

disordered eating



What is Disordered Eating?

Disordered eating consists of a range of thoughts and feelings about food and body image that lie between healthy/normal eating habits with body acceptance at one end and eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder) at the other. These behaviours are not just about eating. They include weight/shape preoccupation, striving for a perfection that doesn't exist, yo-yo dieting, excessive exercising, fasting or restricting, compulsive overeating, purging, steroid use, and laxative abuse.

Who does it affect?

At least one-tenth of the population is thought to be living with some kind of eating disorder (greater risk is found with dancers, models, actors and athletes). Almost all women and girls over the age of 11, along with increasing numbers of men and boys, have at one time indulged in disordered eating, generally through going on a diet. Research tells us that 81% of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat, and 98% of females are unhappy with their bodies. 67% of British Columbia youth *with a healthy weight* are trying to lose weight. (McCreary Study, 2009) Diets have an estimated **97% failure rate**. Revenue estimates for the weight loss industry? Over **\$68.7 billion** annually!

Strong social and media messaging tell us that happiness lies in being unrealistically thin, perfectly muscled, and always in control. This kind of messaging leads too many children and teens to adopt an unhealthy body image and to then create equally unhealthy ways to maintain it.



While some of the actions from the centre of this spectrum are symptoms of an eating disorder, they may not occur as often or to such an extreme that a doctor would consider them to be anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder.

Disordered eating symptoms may occur once in a while or at certain key moments in your life - a stressful event, an illness or preparing for an athletic event. However, when disordered eating continues for long periods of time and starts to get in the way of everyday life and activities, or is used to cope with strong feelings, it may lead to an eating disorder. Those engaging in disordered eating are more at risk for eating disorders.

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Where do I go from here?

Jessie's Legacy a program of Family Services of the North Shore provides web based eating disorders prevention resources to support BC youth, families, educators and professionals. Family Services of the North Shore is one of the 7 BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information.

Visit www.jessieslegacy.com or www.heretohelp.bc.ca

- Find a parenting/teaching style based on kindness, fairness and consistency that also sets firm boundaries and realistic consequences.
- Model the way you expect your children to act. Show them how to eat a variety of foods and exercise for fun and good health, not just to burn calories.
- Maintain a family atmosphere where open and honest communication is valued and children are allowed to express their own opinions.
- Let your children know you value inner beauty over outer beauty and refrain from making comments about looks and weight.
- Model a balanced approach to eating and food, sit down to regular family meals, and don't use food to bribe, reward or punish children.
- Teach your children how to think critically. Give them room to disagree, and challenge conventional wisdom in order to resist the lure of media messages and peer pressure. Model *how* to think not *what* to think.
- Let your children know they are unique, valued and lovable just the way they are, not for how they look, the marks they get or their athletic ability.

If your child is already showing signs of disordered eating, it is important to get help before disordered eating becomes an eating disorder.

Talk to a counsellor and be sure your child has regular visits to the doctor and dentist.

A nutritionist or dietitian can help you and your child learn about food and help your family create healthy meal plans. Call 811.

If bingeing or overeating is a concern, the Rudd Center for Food Policy at Yale University, www.yaleruddcenter.org, may provide some helpful suggestions.

Other ideas include:

- Help your child learn stress management and problem solving strategies
- Make sure your child keeps active and stays in touch with family and friends
- Take time to do things with your child that your child enjoys.
- Make sure your child is getting enough sleep

♥ **Counselling**

♥ **Support**

♥ **Education**

Family Services of the North Shore is an accredited not-for-profit community-based agency that offers education, support and counselling services. We also lead the provincial work in eating disorders prevention. Family Services of the North Shore has been caring for the community for over 60 years. Our high-profile, proactive presence throughout the province connects the community through a variety of programs that create an environment for all families and individuals to thrive.

We recognize the continuing contribution of the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, and the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia.



Family Services of the North Shore
#203 – 1111 Lonsdale Avenue
North Vancouver, BC V7M 2H4
tel 604 – 988 -5281 fax 604 – 988 – 3961
www.familyservices.bc.ca