



National Eating Disorders Association

**NATIONAL  
EATING DISORDERS  
AWARENESS  
WEEK** FEB 21-27

# EATING DISORDERS IN SCHOOLS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND HOW TO HELP.



**3 MINUTES  
CAN SAVE A LIFE**

GET SCREENED. GET HELP. GET HEALTHY.

## Eating Disorders and Schools

Being a student can be overwhelming—between changing course loads, social politics and balancing schoolwork, friends and family, there are a lot of stressors. During this tenuous time, mental health problems, including eating disorders, may manifest, but students might not have access to the necessary support systems for early intervention. School administrations should work towards establishing campuses that encourage mental and physical wellness, provide supportive services to students in need and give staff and students the tools to help those who may be struggling.

### What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders (EDs) are real, complex medical and psychiatric illnesses that can have serious consequences for health, productivity and relationships. They are caused by both genetic and environmental factors. EDs are bio-psycho-social diseases; they are not a fad, phase or lifestyle choice.

In the United States, 20 million women and 10 million men suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder at some time in their life. Eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and OSFED (other specified feeding or eating disorder).

People struggling with an eating disorder typically become obsessed with food, body image and/or weight. These disorders can become very serious, chronic and life-threatening if not recognized and treated appropriately. The earlier a person seeks treatment, the greater the likelihood of physical and emotional recovery.

### What are the warning signs of an eating disorder?

- In general, behaviors and attitudes indicating that weight loss, dieting and control of food are becoming primary concerns.
- Evidence of binge eating, including disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time or finding wrappers and containers indicating the consumption of large amounts of food.
- Evidence of purging behaviors, including frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, signs and/or smells of vomiting or presence of wrappers or packages of laxatives or diuretics.
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimen—despite weather, fatigue, illness or injury, the compulsive need to “burn off” calories taken in.
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities.

### **3 MINUTES CAN SAVE A LIFE**

**GET SCREENED. GET HELP. GET HEALTHY.**

Early intervention saves lives. NEDA’s online eating disorders screening takes only three minutes. Organize a school-wide screening or share the link with your students and staff:

[screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/NEDA](https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/NEDA)

## How can eating disorders affect a school?

- Over half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control measure (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).
- The rate of eating disorders among college students surveyed at one college increased from 7.9% to 25% for males and 23.4% to 32.6% for females over a 13-year period (White, 2011).
- Full-blown eating disorders typically begin between 18 and 21 years of age (Hudson, 2007).
- Eating disorders can affect an employee’s cognitive functioning because of poor nutrition and coexisting mental disorders.
- As with many illnesses, eating disorders have serious health effects that, gone untreated, may lead to lost productivity and long-term medical problems
- Eating disorders can affect anyone. High-performing, dedicated students may struggle with disordered eating and poor body image, impairing otherwise excellent performance. School administrations should encourage welcoming and inclusive campuses, optimizing productivity and wellness.
- Early intervention and treatment are the best measures to ensure proper management of medical problems and encourage recovery.
- Medical complications of eating disorders may include, but are not limited to:

Anorexia Nervosa	Bulimia Nervosa	Binge Eating Disorder
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Heart failure</li> <li>▪ Osteoporosis</li> <li>▪ Muscle loss and weakness</li> <li>▪ Kidney failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Heart failure</li> <li>▪ Gastric rupture</li> <li>▪ Tooth decay</li> <li>▪ Peptic ulcers and pancreatitis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Heart disease</li> <li>▪ Type II diabetes mellitus</li> <li>▪ Gallbladder disease</li> <li>▪ High cholesterol</li> </ul>

## What about campus culture?

- Health and wellness are important, but in our weight-obsessed culture, health concerns often manifest as a preoccupation with obesity and obesity prevention. Any efforts to improve your campus’s overall health should be weight-neutral; stigmatizing size and eating may lead students to develop body image concerns and disordered eating. Promote body esteem and healthy lifestyle behaviors, not weight loss.
- Create an environment in which students know they can approach trusted staff members with concerns about themselves or their peers. Developing formalized support systems, particularly for freshmen who may still be finding their place on campus, offers students pathways to help that can make the difference between recovery and worsening eating problems.
- Some students may promote negative attitudes towards a diversity of body shapes and sizes. The school administration should quickly and clearly respond to any inappropriate behavior, creating a campus that is safe for all students. Weight-related bullying is harassment, and it should be treated accordingly.

## How can you help your students?

### Educate Yourself—and Your Staff

- NEDA’s Educator Toolkit offers school-specific information on eating disorders. Educate yourself and share it with your coworkers: [www.myNEDA.org/educator-toolkit](http://www.myNEDA.org/educator-toolkit).
- Incorporate education on eating disorders signs and symptoms into training for athletic department and residential life personnel.
- Counselors and nutritionists should be trained on identifying symptoms of eating disorders and disordered eating, and should be available to any student who is concerned about disordered eating.
- At least one staff counselor or nutritionist should have a specialty in eating disorders and be available as a source of knowledge and guidance for other personnel.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Help-seeking decreases significantly when people are not aware of the options available to them.

*(Ben-Porath, 2002; Friedman, 2009; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2006; Gould, 2007)*

### Screen & Intervene

- Early intervention and treatment are the best measures to encourage recovery.
- Organize screenings and share NEDA’s screening tool link ([screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/NEDA](http://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/NEDA)) with parent groups.

### Take it out of the Classroom

- Offer a standing support group for individuals who have struggled with an eating disorder.
- Develop formalized support systems for students to report concerns about themselves or their peers.
- Provide educational events on eating disorders and body image.

### Provide Resources

- Provide resources in person: Keep NEDA and Proud2Bme brochures readily available in the counseling center and health services. Consider keeping a list of local providers available for your students ([www.myNEDA.org/find-treatment](http://www.myNEDA.org/find-treatment)).
- Provide resources on your webpage: Link to the NEDA website ([www.myNEDA.org](http://www.myNEDA.org)), Proud2Bme ([www.Proud2Bme.org](http://www.Proud2Bme.org)), and the online eating disorder screening ([screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/NEDA](http://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/NEDA)).
- Clearly display contact information for NEDA’s Helpline online and in health services:
  - NEDA Information & Referral Helpline: (800) 931-2237
  - NEDA Click to Chat: [www.myneda.org/helplinechat](http://www.myneda.org/helplinechat)
- Provide online and in-person access to NEDA’s Toolkits for parents ([www.myNEDA.org/parent-toolkit](http://www.myNEDA.org/parent-toolkit)), educators ([www.myNEDA.org/educator-toolkit](http://www.myNEDA.org/educator-toolkit)) and coaches and trainers ([www.myNEDA.org/coach-trainer](http://www.myNEDA.org/coach-trainer)).
- Eating disorders are a pervasive problem in schools—but they don’t have to be. Providing education, developing support systems and fostering a healthy campus culture creates a safe and supportive environment for all of your students, encouraging them to get screened, get help and get healthy.

**Questions? Visit [www.myNEDA.org](http://www.myNEDA.org) for eating disorders information, resources and treatment options.**