



Handout 4.1: Eating Disorder Progression and Recovery

- Cultural emphasis on thinness
- Biological predisposition
- Family environment
- Abuse experiences

PRE-DISEASE

- Experimenting with laxatives and diuretics
- Skipping meals--often breakfast and/or lunch
- Binges at night
- Misperception of hunger, satiety & other bodily sensations
- Weight fluctuations
- Guilt feelings after eating
- Compulsive exercise
- Isolation from family and friends

EARLY SYMPTOMS

- Person learns that bingeing, restricting, or purging provides a mood swing in the direction of euphoria
- Person learns to trust that bingeing, restricting or purging will provide a positive mood change every time the behaviors are used
- Person learns to control when and how often behaviors are to be used to regulate mood
- Various diets undertaken
- Distorted body image
- Constant concern with body image and weight
- Progressive preoccupation with food and eating
- Fear of getting out of control
- Tiredness, apathy, irritability
- Lying about eating
- Eating alone in order to eat more (or less)
- Stealing money, food, laxatives

MIDDLE STAGE SYMPTOMS

- Menstrual cycle becomes irregular or stops
- Fights or conflicts with friends and family about eating/weight
- Defensiveness--unable to discuss the problem
- Perfectionistic behavior
- Mood swings
- Thinking becomes rigid and of gaining weight
- School, family, social problems escalate
- Thinning hair, loss of hair
- Apathy
- Life feels out of control
- Persistent remorse
- Difficulty walking
- Institutionalizations
- Denial of the problem
- Diminished capacity to think/ focus

CRUCIAL STAGE SYMPTOMS

- Increased dependence on bingeing, restricting, or purging in order to relieve anxiety or stay in control
- Depression
- Sleep disturbances
- Tooth damage, gum disease (due to purging)
- Inability to continue normal activities
- Chronic fatigue
- Electrolyte imbalance
- Life revolves around eating
- Weight concerns
- Chronic sore throat
- Irregular heart rhythms
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts

RECOGNITION OF NEED FOR HELP

- Person makes a decision to get help
- Establishes abstinence
- Accepts support from others, including hospitalization if needed

REHABILITATION

- Develops problem-solving skills
- Expresses feelings
- Sets appropriate boundaries with others
- Honest with self and others
- Makes a commitments to ongoing care through therapy, 12-step meetings, obtaining a sponsor
- Mood stabilization

RECOVERY

- Intimate relationships form
- Sense of self develops
- Amends to self and others
- Relapse prevention
- Energy returns
- Interests expand
- Reduction of stress
- Takes honest inventory

ONGOING SUPPORT

- Helping others
- Continues to take regular inventory
- Increasing serenity and sense of meaning and purpose