

Feb 26-Mar 4, 2006—National Eating Disorders Awareness Week

## HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WITH AN EATING DISORDER

Do you have a friend struggling with an eating disorder, such as anorexia, bulimia, or a binge eating?

Having an understanding of eating disorders is important for you to better help your friend. Eating disorders are illnesses and not choices. They arise from a variety of physical, emotional, social, and familial issues. All of these issues need to be addressed with the help of a professional for effective prevention and treatment of eating disorders. People with eating disorders have a real mental illness that distorts their body image. They starve themselves to be constantly thinner. This eating pattern can cause organ damage and even death.

According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NADA), you cannot force someone to seek help, change their eating habits, or change their attitudes. But, you can help your friend by honestly sharing your concerns, providing support, and finding out where to go for more information.

Following are additional ideas from NADA on what to do to help your friend:

Learn as much as you can about eating disorders. Call NADA toll free at 1-800-931-2237

Know the differences between facts and myths about weight, nutrition, and exercise, so you can reason against a friend's inaccurate ideas.

Talk openly and honestly with your friend about your concerns.

Be caring, but be firm. Don't allow your friend to manipulate you. Your friend must be responsible for her or his behavior. Avoid making rules, promises, or expectations you cannot keep.

Compliment your friend on her or his wonderful personality, successes, or accomplishments.

Be a good role model for healthy eating, exercise, and self-acceptance.

Tell someone else (e.g. a relative, medical professional or counselor) about your concerns for your friend. Addressing body image and eating disorders early before they become life threatening offers a better chance for success in becoming healthy again.

Eating disorders are not just a "woman's or a girl's problem." Males who are preoccupied with shape and weight can also develop eating disorders as well as dangerous shape control practices like steroid use.

For more information on eating disorders, call the NADA toll-free information and referral helpline at (800) 931-2237, or visit the NADA website at [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org).

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