

33 Things People With Eating Disorders Wish You Would Understand

by Allison Rae

Eating disorders are a prison no one else can see, and no one else has the keys to.

When I was sixteen, I worked up the nerve to tell one of my best friends my darkest secret: I starve myself. She laughed, and said “Eating disorders aren’t real. It’s all just in your head. Let’s go get dinner.” I couldn’t blame her. I myself didn’t fully understand what was going on with me. How could I expect her to understand it?

The world of eating disorders isn’t a place anyone wants to visit or talk about. It’s much easier to stay silent than to speak up about a topic that’s sure to turn the room into anxious looks and faces of confusion. The stigma is real, and it’s stifling. As a result, some insensitive things have been avoidably done and said. Maybe the world isn’t ready to completely understand all the complicated aspects of eating disorders yet, but here are thirty-three things someone with an eating disorder wishes they could tell you.

1. I have an eating disorder. I am not an eating disorder.

2. It’s not a lifestyle choice. It’s a serious illness.

3. Eating disorders aren’t a physical disorder. It’s not actually about food. There are physical side effects, but it’s mental. It’s about my body. It’s about control. (Yes, it IS in my head. That’s where the problem is located. I want it out of my head. You wouldn’t tell someone with a broken leg that it’s all in their leg and dismiss it).

4. The world of eating disorders is a dark and lonely place. If I’m inviting you into it and sharing that secret, I trust you more than anything. Please don’t take advantage of that trust.

5. An eating disorder is best friends with anxiety.

6. If I could get rid of all of this by ‘just eating’, I would have done it a long time ago.

7. The little things help: The high fives when I’m proud of myself for finishing a meal, the gentle reminder that I haven’t eaten all day, the offer to cook dinner for me if I want it. I notice it, and I will never be able to thank you enough.

8. I’m going to have bad days. No recovery is perfect, and part of my recovery is learning that perfection isn’t possible. When I take steps backwards I have to accept it, move on, and try again. I understand that it’s hard on you as well.

9. Eating disorders come in all shapes and sizes. The skin and bones girl you see when you google “anorexia”? That’s not the majority.

10. I will always be jealous of the way you can eat without a sinking feeling of self-hatred afterward. I wish I didn’t envy you. But I do. I think about myself having a normal diet all the time, but it’s easier said than done.

11. I still love food. It’s a complicated relationship. I’m sure I think about food more than you do.

12. Don’t tell me I’m too skinny. Don’t mention my weight to me at all if you can help it. If I’ve lost it or gained it, I’m well aware.

13. Eating disorders starve you of more than just food. They starve you of happiness.

14. I wish I could see what you see when you look at me, but I don’t.

15. I will get defensive. It’s not you. It’s me.

- 16. You can't fix me, even though it probably seems like a simple solution to you.** No amount of "you're beautiful"s are going to undo the damage that's been done.
- 17. Please never try and force me to eat when I say I can't.** Support works more than force.
- 18. There's nothing I would love more than cooking with you and enjoying a meal with you.** I want that so much.
- 19. I'm not broken just because I'm struggling.** Please don't feel like you have to walk on eggshells around me. All I want from you is support, and to not feel alone.
- 20. Anorexia isn't me trying to be beautiful and skinny.** It's me wishing I could just disappear completely because I take up too much space.
- 21. Bulimia isn't me "having my cake and eating it too".** It's a way to punish myself.
- 22. An eating disorder is an addiction as much as alcoholism is an addiction.** The difference is that you don't need to drink alcohol to survive, but you do need to eat. Food is everywhere, and I can't avoid it. Know that my mind never gets a break.
- 23. I never want my eating disorder to burden you the way it's burdened me.** If it's too much for you, I don't want you to feel as though you're trapped.
- 24. I'm genuinely sorry for the times I've cancelled plans on you because I felt too ashamed to face the world that day.** You don't deserve that.
- 25. Please don't be offended if I get quiet when you talk about food.** I don't know how to look at food as anything besides a curse.
- 26. There's nothing glamorous about passing out at school.** There's nothing glamorous about throwing up in a disgusting public bathroom because that single french fry you ate earlier was too much. No matter what the media says. Eating disorders aren't willpower, or strength. They aren't a pretty skinny girl with long hair and an oversized sweater looking slightly upset and shyly refusing a cupcake.
- 27. If I ever eat something around you, it's the biggest sign of trust I could show you.** Please don't bring attention to it.
- 28. I don't want you to ever feel guilty when you eat in front of me when I'm not eating with you.** Watching you genuinely enjoying food makes me happier than you realize.
- 29. When I ask you how I look or if something makes me look fat, I'm not digging for compliments.** I just need reassurance that what I see in the mirror isn't reality.
- 30. I've never looked at a picture of a model and wanted to look like them.** I just see myself and want to look less like me.
- 31. That time I told you I didn't want to be your size, I wasn't calling you fat.** You're beautiful. Your size and confidence is a happiness that I don't think I deserve.
- 32. Please don't tell me that you need to go on a diet or that you're fat.** You're perfect the way you are. I know how much this obsession takes over, and I never want to see it ruin you too.
- 33. I don't, and never will expect you to fully understand what I'm going through.** I don't think I'll ever understand it myself.