

FIRST STEPS

what to do when you think you
(or a loved one) has an eating
disorder

1 Identify the symptoms

Eating disorders can include a wide variety of symptoms. Check this brief list to determine if you are experiencing any of the following:

- Obsession with food and/or body image
- Food-related behaviors such as restricting, purging, bingeing
- Other compensatory behaviors such as excessive exercise, diet pill usage, laxative usage
- Concurrent feelings of anxiety, depression or low worth (especially regarding the body or food)

2

Understand that there are different ways eating disorders can manifest for individuals

- Historically, we have understood eating disorders to primarily occur in underweight individuals (often in young, white women). Now, we have a better understanding that eating disorders can occur in all persons, across the racial, gender, and body type/size spectrum.
- It's important to understand that just because someone isn't underweight, does not mean that they do not have an eating disorder. Symptoms and health outcomes can be just as severe for someone in an average or larger body.
- Not all eating disorders are about body image
With Avoidant and Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), an individual may experience severe restriction of food intake; however, the cause is due to a sensory aversion of certain foods or fears of potential adverse consequences of eating



3

Begin to seek the support that you need

Eating disorders are best treated utilizing a team approach. If you are able, having each of these members on your team will best serve your recovery:

- **Physician** - to oversee your medical progress
- **Dietitian** - to assist with nutrition education and to make sure you are meeting your nutritional needs
- **Therapist** - to process the emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects of the eating disorder
- **Support persons** - (caregivers, partners, friends, coaches, confidants) to give day to day support
- **Other supports** - for some, the addition of professionals such as a psychiatrist (medication manager) or spiritual guide may be beneficial



4

Remember that recovery is possible

- Starting treatment can feel overwhelming, but recovery is within reach
- Know that you are not alone; eating disorders are highly prevalent - although often not discussed
- Resources are available through [EDCI](#) and other [national organizations](#)



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Next steps to consider

- Opening up to friends and family about your concerns
- Discontinuing any activity that you might consider to be harmful to recovery such as calorie tracking (such as apps or My Fitness Pal) or extreme exercise programs
- Joining a virtual [support group](#)