

HOW TO DEAL WITH BULIMIA



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We've all been there: turning to the fridge when feeling lonely or bored or indulging in seconds or thirds when stressed. But when you suffer from bulimia, the now-and-then impulse to overeat is more like a compulsion. And instead of eating sensibly to make up for it, you punish yourself by purging, fasting, or exercising to get rid of the calories.

This vicious cycle of bingeing and purging takes a toll on the body, and it's even harder on emotional well-being. But the cycle can be broken. Effective bulimia treatment and support can help you develop a healthier relationship with food and overcome feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame.

What Is Bulimia?

Amy's Story. Once again, Amy is on a liquid diet. "I'm going to stick with it," she tells herself. "I won't give in to the cravings this time." But as the day goes on, Amy's willpower weakens. All she can think about is food. Finally, she decides to give in to the urge to binge. She can't control herself any longer. She grabs a pint of ice cream out of the freezer, inhaling it within a matter of minutes. Then it's on to anything else she can find in the kitchen. After 45 minutes of bingeing, Amy is so stuffed that her stomach feels like it's going to burst. She's disgusted with herself and terrified by the thousands of calories she's consumed. She runs to the bathroom to throw up. Afterwards, she steps on the scale to make sure she hasn't gained any weight. She vows to start her diet again tomorrow. Tomorrow, it will be different.

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by frequent episodes of binge eating, followed by frantic efforts to avoid gaining weight.

When you're struggling with bulimia, life is a constant battle between the desire to lose weight or stay thin and the overwhelming compulsion to binge eat.

You don't want to binge - you know you'll feel guilty and ashamed afterwards - but time and again you give in. During an average binge, you may consume from 3,000 to 5,000 calories in one short hour.

After it ends, panic sets in and you turn to drastic measures to “undo” the binge, such as taking a laxative, inducing vomiting, or going for a ten-kilometre run. And all the while, you feel increasingly out of control.

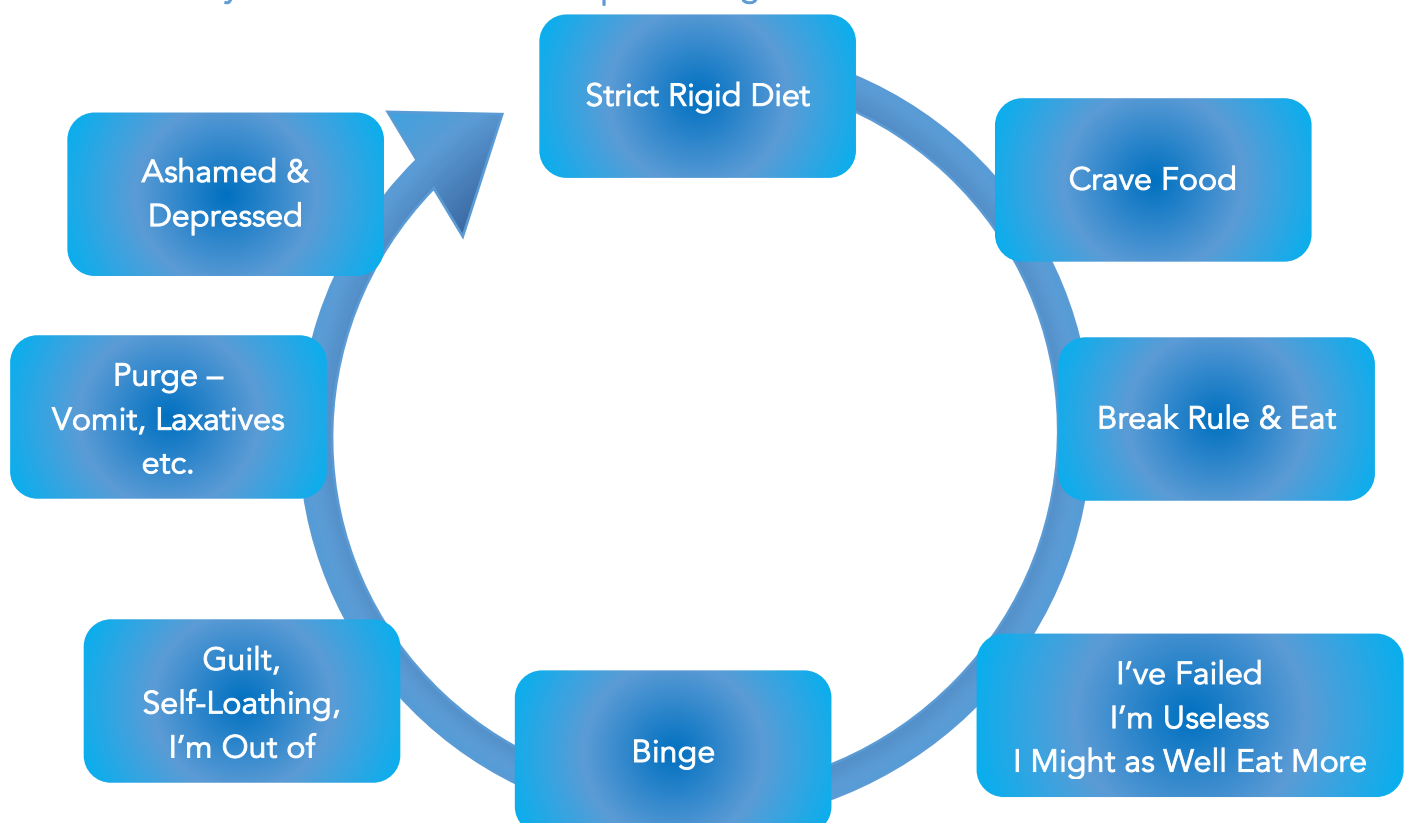
It’s important to note that bulimia doesn’t necessarily involve purging - physically eliminating the food from your body by throwing up or using laxatives, enemas, or diuretics. If you make up for your binges by fasting, exercising to excess, or going on crash diets, this also qualifies as bulimia.

Am I Bulimic?

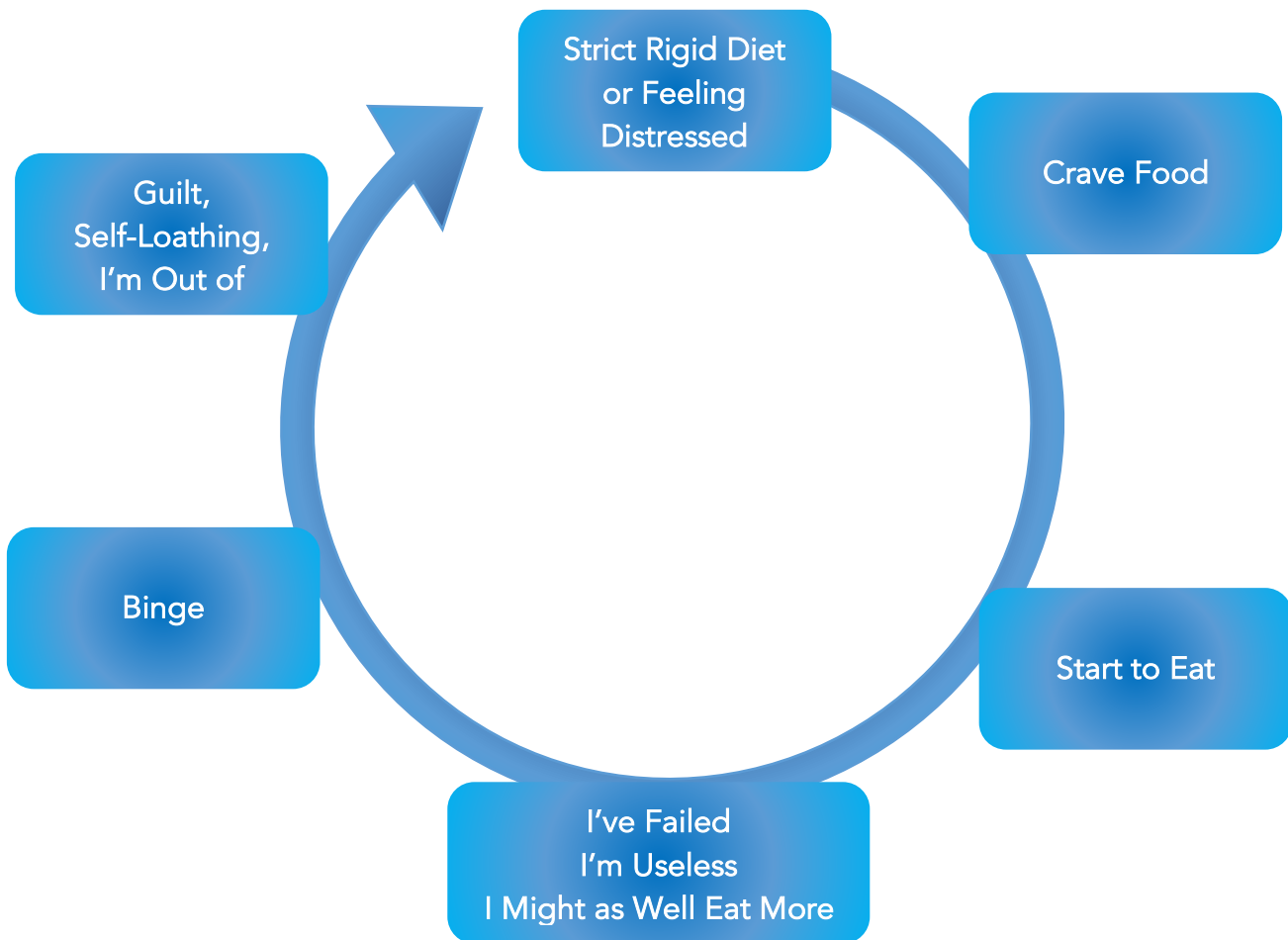
Ask yourself the following questions. The more “yes” answers, the more likely you are suffering from bulimia or another eating disorder.

- Are you obsessed with your body and your weight?
- Does food and dieting dominate your life?
- Are you afraid that when you start eating, you won’t be able to stop?
- Do you ever eat until you feel sick?
- Do you feel guilty, ashamed, or depressed after you eat?
- Do you vomit or take laxatives to control your weight?

Vicious Cycle of Bulimia - What Keeps It Going?



Vicious Cycle of Binge Eating - Similar, But No Purging



Dieting triggers bulimia's destructive cycle of bingeing and purging. The irony is that the more strict and rigid the diet, the more likely it is that you'll become preoccupied, even obsessed, with food. When you starve yourself, your body responds with powerful cravings - its way of asking for needed nutrition.

As the tension, hunger, and feelings of deprivation build, the compulsion to eat becomes too powerful to resist: a "forbidden" food is eaten; a dietary rule is broken. With an all-or-nothing mindset, you feel any diet slip-up is a total failure. After having a bite of ice cream, you might think, "I've already blown it, so I might as well go all out."

Unfortunately, the relief that bingeing brings is extremely short-lived. Soon after, guilt and self-loathing set in. And so, you purge to make up for bingeing and regain control.

Unfortunately, purging only reinforces binge eating. Though you may tell yourself, as you launch into a new diet, that this is the last time, in the back of your mind there's a voice telling you that you can always throw up or use laxatives if you lose control again. What you may not realize is that purging doesn't come close to wiping the slate clean after a binge.

Purging Does NOT Prevent Weight Gain

Purging isn't effective at getting rid of calories, which is why most people suffering with bulimia end up gaining weight over time. Vomiting immediately after eating will only eliminate 50% of the calories consumed at best – and usually much less. This is because calorie absorption begins the moment you put food in the mouth. Laxatives and diuretics are even less effective. Laxatives get rid of only 10% of the calories eaten, and diuretics do nothing at all. You may weigh less after taking them, but that lower number on the scale is due to water loss, not true weight loss.

Signs and Symptoms of Bulimia

If you've been living with bulimia for a while, you've probably "done it all" to conceal your bingeing and purging habits. It's only human to feel ashamed about having a hard time controlling yourself with food, so you most likely binge alone. If you eat a box of doughnuts, then you'll replace them, so your friends or family won't notice. When buying food for a binge, you might shop at four separate markets, so the checker won't guess. But despite your secret life, those closest to you probably have a sense that something is not right.

Binge Eating Signs and Symptoms

- **Lack of control overeating** – Inability to stop eating. Eating until the point of physical discomfort and pain.
- **Secrecy surrounding eating** – Going to the kitchen after everyone else has gone to bed. Going out alone on unexpected food runs. Wanting to eat in privacy.
- **Eating unusually large amounts of food** with no obvious change in weight.
- **Disappearance of food**, numerous empty wrappers or food containers in the garbage, or hidden stashes of junk food.
- **Alternating between overeating and fasting** – Rarely eats normal meals. It's all-or-nothing when it comes to food.

Purging signs and symptoms

- **Going to the bathroom after meals** – Frequently disappears after meals or takes a trip to the bathroom to throw up. May run the water to disguise sounds of vomiting.
- **Using laxatives, diuretics, or enemas** after eating. May also take diet pills to curb appetite or use the sauna to "sweat out" water weight.
- **Smell of vomit** – The bathroom or the person may smell like vomit. They may try to cover up the smell with mouthwash, perfume, air freshener, gum, or mints.
- **Excessive exercising** – Works out strenuously, especially after eating. Typical activities include high-intensity calorie burners such as running or aerobics.

Physical Signs and Symptoms of Bulimia

- Calluses or scars on the knuckles or hands from sticking fingers down the throat to induce vomiting.
- Puffy “chipmunk” cheeks caused by repeated vomiting.
- Discoloured teeth from exposure to stomach acid when throwing up. May look yellow, ragged, or clear.
- Not underweight – Men and women with bulimia are usually normal weight or slightly overweight. Being underweight while purging might indicate a purging type of anorexia.
- Frequent fluctuations in weight – Weight may fluctuate by five kilos or more due to alternating episodes of bingeing and purging.

Effects of Bulimia

When you are living with bulimia, you are putting your body - and even your life - at risk. The most dangerous side effect of bulimia is dehydration due to purging. Vomiting, laxatives, and diuretics can cause electrolyte imbalances in the body, most commonly in the form of low potassium levels. Low potassium levels trigger a wide range of symptoms ranging from lethargy and cloudy thinking to irregular heartbeat and death. Chronically low levels of potassium can also result in kidney failure. Other results are:

- Weight gain
- Abdominal pain, bloating
- Swelling of the hands and feet
- Chronic sore throat, hoarseness
- Broken blood vessels in the eyes
- Swollen cheeks and salivary glands
- Weakness and dizziness
- Tooth decay and mouth sores
- Ruptured stomach or oesophagus
- Loss of menstrual periods
- Chronic constipation from laxative abuse

Bulimia Causes and Risk Factors

There is no single cause of bulimia. While low self-esteem and concerns about weight and body image play major roles, there are many other contributing causes. In most cases, people suffering with bulimia - and eating disorders in general - have trouble managing emotions in a healthy way. Eating can be an emotional release so it's not surprising that people binge and purge when feeling angry, depressed, stressed, or anxious.

One thing is certain. Bulimia is a complex emotional issue. Major causes and risk factors for bulimia include:

- **Poor body image:** Our culture's emphasis on thinness and beauty can lead to body dissatisfaction, particularly in young women bombarded with media images of an unrealistic physical ideal.
- **Low self-esteem:** People who think of themselves as useless, worthless, and unattractive are at risk for bulimia. Things that can contribute to low self-esteem include depression, perfectionism, childhood abuse, and a critical home environment.
- **History of trauma or abuse:** Women with bulimia appear to have a higher incidence of sexual abuse. People with bulimia are also more likely than average to have parents with a substance abuse problem or psychological disorder.
- **Major life changes:** Bulimia is often triggered by stressful changes or transitions, such as the physical changes of puberty, going away to college, or the breakup of a relationship. Binging and purging may be a negative way to cope with the stress.
- **Appearance-oriented professions or activities:** People who face tremendous image pressure are vulnerable to developing bulimia. Those at risk include ballet dancers, models, gymnasts, wrestlers, runners, and actors.

Getting Help for Bulimia

If you are living with bulimia, you know how scary it feels to be so out of control. Knowing that you are harming your body just adds to the fear. But take heart: change is possible. Regardless of how long you've struggled with bulimia, you can learn to break the binge and purge cycle and develop a healthier attitude toward food and your body.

Taking steps toward recovery is tough. It's common to feel ambivalent about giving up your bingeing and purging, even though it's harmful. If you are even thinking of getting help for bulimia, you are taking a big step forward.

Steps to Bulimia Recovery

- **Admit you have a problem.** Up until now, you've been invested in the idea that life will be better - that you'll finally feel good - if you lose more weight and control what you eat. The first step in bulimia recovery is admitting that your relationship to food is distorted and out of control.

- **Talk to someone.** It can be hard to talk about what you're going through, especially if you've kept your bulimia a secret for a long time. You may be ashamed, ambivalent, or afraid of what others will think. But it's important to understand that you're not alone. Find a good listener - someone who will support you as you try to get better.
- **Stay away from people, places, and activities that trigger the temptation to binge or purge.** You may need to avoid looking at fashion or fitness magazines, spend less time with friends who constantly diet and talk about losing weight, and stay away from weight loss web sites and "pro-mia" sites that promote bulimia. You may also need to be careful when it comes to meal planning and cooking magazines and shows.
- **Seek professional help.** The advice and support of trained eating disorder professionals can help you regain your health, learn to eat normally again, and develop healthier attitudes about food and your body.

The Importance of Deciding Not to Diet

Treatment for bulimia is much more likely to succeed when you stop dieting. Once you stop trying to restrict calories and follow healthy dietary rules, you will no longer be overwhelmed with cravings and thoughts of foods. By eating normally, you can break the binge-and-purge cycle and still reach a healthy, attractive weight.

Bulimia Treatment and Therapy

To stop the cycle of bingeing and purging, it's important to seek professional help early, follow through with treatment, and resolve the underlying emotional issues that caused the bulimia in the first place.

Because poor body image and low self-esteem lie at the heart of bulimia, therapy is an important part of recovery. It's common to feel isolated and shamed by your bingeing and purging, and therapists can help with these feelings.

The treatment of choice for bulimia is cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). Cognitive-behavioural therapy targets the unhealthy eating behaviours of bulimia and the unrealistic, negative thoughts that fuel them. Here's what to expect in bulimia therapy:

- **Breaking the binge-and-purge cycle** – The first phase of bulimia treatment focuses on stopping the vicious cycle of bingeing and purging and restoring normal eating patterns. You learn to monitor your eating habits, avoid

situations that trigger binges, cope with stress in ways that don't involve food, eat regularly to reduce food cravings, and fight the urge to purge.

- **Changing unhealthy thoughts and patterns** – The second phase of bulimia treatment focuses on identifying and changing dysfunctional beliefs about weight, dieting, and body shape. You explore attitudes about eating, and rethink the idea that self-worth is based on weight.
- **Solving emotional issues** – The final phase of bulimia treatment involves targeting emotional issues that caused the eating disorder in the first place. Therapy may focus on relationship issues, underlying anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- **Eliminate stress** - Stress is the mother of all psychological problems, as well as many physical illnesses. The less stressed you are, the easier it will be making healthier decisions in every area of your life, think more clearly, and to feel more in control of yourself.

Learn to Recognize Stress

Recognizing stress is the first step in lessening its impact. Many of us spend so much time in a stressed state, we have forgotten what it feels like to be fully relaxed and alert. Being stressed out feels normal.

What does it feel like to be calm and stress-free? You can see that “just right” inner balance in the smile of a happy baby - a face so full of joy it reminds adults of the balanced emotional state that most of us have misplaced. In adulthood, being balanced means maintaining a calm state of energy, alertness, and focus. Calmness is more than just feeling relaxed; being alert is an equally important aspect of finding the balance needed to withstand stress.

If you don't feel calm, alert, productive, and focused most of the time in your daily life, then too much stress may be a problem for you.

Tips for Recognizing When You're Stressed

Hush the voice that's telling you, “Oh, I'm fine.” Notice how your breathing has changed. Are your muscles tense? Awareness of your physical response to stress will help regulate the tension when it occurs. When you're tired, your eyes feel heavy and you might rest your head on your hand. When you're happy, you laugh easily. And when you are stressed, your body lets you know that too. Try to get in the habit of paying attention to your body's clues.

- **Observe your muscles and insides.** Are your muscles tight/sore? Is your stomach tight or sore? Are your hands clenched?
- **Observe your breath.** Is your breath shallow? Place one hand on your belly, the other on your chest. Watch your hands rise and fall with each breath. Notice when you breathe fully or when you "forget" to breathe.

Practice Deep Slow Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing is the most effective way to quiet and calm the mind and soul. It helps contribute to an overall feeling of wellbeing. And who doesn't need that? Better breathing also allows oxygen to be more freely distributed to every cell in the body. The brain and all of the body's organs work much more effectively.

The relaxation response has a very positive effect on the body's overall health, including physical, mental and even spiritual wellbeing. Our nervous system, which is so often filled with tension, is soothed and stress is reduced.

Deep breathing exercises are physically energizing and help one charge one's overworked batteries. It is beneficial for those who suffer from frequent headaches. Deep breathing has the ability to change extreme tiredness into energy and restlessness into tranquillity.

Breathing a whole centring breath takes us from the centre of our physical being while uniting us with our mental and spiritual capacities. The physical, spiritual/emotional, and mental capacities work in accord. From here, we eat better, we exercise more regularly, we rest when needed. We simply make better judgements that empower life in balance.

Endorphins are endogenous opioid peptides that act as neurotransmitters. They are five hundred times more potent than morphine. They have physical and emotional pain-relieving capabilities and they give a person a sense of ease and peace. I can tell you from personal experience that deep diaphragmatic breathing releases endorphins.

The Basics of Quick Stress Relief

Yoga and meditation work wonders for improving our coping skills. But who can take a moment to chant or meditate during a job interview or a disagreement with your boyfriend? For these situations, you need something more immediate and accessible. That's when quick stress relief comes to the rescue.

The speediest way to stamp out stress is by engaging one or more of your senses - your sense of sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, or movement - to rapidly calm and energize yourself.

The key to practicing quick stress relief is learning what kind of sensory input helps your particular nervous system find calm and focus quickly. Everyone responds to sensory input a little differently, so an awareness of your preferences is essential for reducing stress.

Talking to someone who listens: a rapid stress reducer. Want to know a quick social stress reliever? Talk to someone! It's true, talking about your stress with a calm and balanced listener will make you feel better instantly. Although it's not always realistic to have a pal close by to lean on, building and maintaining a friendship network is ultimately good for your mental health. Between quick stress relief techniques and good listeners, you'll have all your bases covered.

Bring Your Senses to The Rescue

Here comes the fun part. Remember exploring your senses in elementary school? Grownups can take a tip from grade school lessons by revisiting the senses and learning how they can help us prevent stress overload. Use the following exercises to identify the types of stressbusting sensory experiences that work quickly and effectively for you.

As you experiment, be as precise as possible. What is the most perfect image, the specific kind of sound, or type of movement that affects you the most? For example, if you're a music lover, listen to many different artists and types of music until you find the song that instantly lifts and relaxes you. The examples listed below are intended to be a jumping off point. It's up to you to zoom in on them and come up with additional things to try.

Sights

If you're a visual person, try to manage and relieve stress by surrounding yourself with soothing and uplifting images. You can also try closing your eyes and imagining the soothing images. Here are a few visually based activities that may work as quick stress relievers:

- Look at a cherished photo or a favourite memento.
- Bring the outside indoors; buy a plant or some flowers to enliven your space.
- Enjoy the beauty of nature – a garden, the beach, a park, or your own backyard.
- Surround yourself with colours that lift your spirits.
- Close your eyes and picture a situation or place that feels peaceful and rejuvenating.

Sound

Are you sensitive to sounds and noises? Are you a music lover? If so, stress-relieving exercises that focus on your auditory sense may work particularly well. Experiment with the following sounds, noting how quickly your stress levels drop as you listen.

- Sing or hum a favourite tune. Listen to uplifting music.
- Tune in to the soundtrack of nature - crashing waves, the wind rustling the trees, birds singing.
- Buy a small fountain, so you can enjoy the soothing sound of running water in your home or office.
- Hang wind chimes near an open window.

Smell and Scents

If you tend to zone out or freeze when stressed, surround yourself with smells that are energizing and invigorating. If you tend to become overly agitated under stress, look for scents that are comforting and calming.

- Light a scented candle or burn some incense.
- Lie down in sheets scented with lavender.
- Smell the roses - or another type of flower.
- Enjoy the clean, fresh air in the great outdoors.
- Spritz on your favourite perfume or cologne.

Touch

Experiment with your sense of touch, playing with different tactile sensations. Focus on things you can feel that are relaxing and renewing. Use the following suggestions as a jumping off point:

- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket.
- Pet a dog or cat.
- Hold a comforting object (a stuffed animal, a favourite memento).
- Soak in a hot bath.
- Give yourself a hand or neck massage.
- Wear clothing that feels soft against your skin.

Taste

Slowly savouring a favourite treat can be very relaxing, but mindless stress eating will only add to your troubles. The key is to indulge your sense of taste mindfully and in moderation. Eat slowly, focusing on the feel of the food in your mouth and the taste on your tongue:

- Chew a piece of sugarless gum.
- Indulge in a small piece of dark chocolate.
- Sip a steaming cup of coffee or tea or a refreshing cold drink.
- Eat a perfectly ripe piece of fruit.
- Enjoy a healthy, crunchy snack (celery, carrots).

Movement

If you tend to shut down when you're under stress, stress-relieving activities that get you moving may be particularly helpful. Anything that engages the muscles or gets you up and active can work. Here are a few suggestions:

- Run in place or jump up and down.
- Dance around.
- Stretch or roll your head in circles.
- Go for a short walk.
- Squeeze a rubbery stress ball.

The Power of Imagination

Sensory rich memories can also quickly reduce stress. After drawing upon your sensory toolbox becomes habit, another approach is to learn to simply imagine vivid sensations when stress strikes. Believe it or not, the sheer memory of your baby's face will have the same calming or energizing effects on your brain as seeing her photo. So, if you can recall a strong sensation, you'll never be without access to your quick stress relief toolbox.

Tips for Finding Sensory Inspiration

Inspiration is everywhere, from sights you see on your way to work to smells and objects around your home. Explore a variety of sensations so that no matter where you are, you'll always have something you can do to relax yourself. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- **Memories.** Think back to what you did as a child to calm down. If you had a blanket or stuffed toy, you might benefit from tactile stimulation. Try tying a textured scarf around your neck before an appointment or keeping a piece of soft suede in your pocket.
- **Watch others.** Observing how others deal with stress can give you valuable insight. Baseball players often pop gum in their mouth before going up to bat. Singers often chat up the crowd before performing. Ask around about what people you know do to stay focused under pressure - it could work for you too.

Overconcern With Shape and Weight

The core problem in all eating disorders is overconcern with shape and weight. When you overcome your overconcern with shape and weight, you've cured your eating disorder.

The specific ways that overconcern with shape and weight manifests itself varies from person to person. Some persons limit themselves to very few calories a day and become extremely thin; others repeatedly try to diet but remain normal weight or overweight. Some persons purge several times a day while others binge but never purge.

Overconcern about shape and weight cannot be changed directly. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) addresses the various behaviours, thoughts, and feelings that are components of the core overconcern with shape and weight. CBT also addresses general personality characteristics that maintain Eating Disorders. The four most important components of Eating Disorders are:

1. Strict dieting,
2. Low weight,
3. Bingeing, and
4. Compensatory behaviours.

These four components create an interacting system of behaviours, emotions, beliefs, personality traits, and physiological processes. This system is responsible for the most important symptoms of Eating Disorders.

How the Four Components of Eating Disorders Interact

Strict dieting includes skipping meals, fasting, eating small amounts of food, and avoiding "bad" or forbidden foods. Strict dieting has two potential consequences: low weight and bingeing.

Low weight causes numerous physical and psychological problems that are sometimes severe or life threatening. Strict dieting always makes you very hungry, and hunger eventually causes you to binge.

Bingeing elicits the core overconcern with shape and weight.

Compensatory behaviours are attempts to undo the effects of bingeing. Compensatory behaviours include vomiting (purging), laxative and diuretic abuse, and excessive exercise.

But compensatory behaviours actually maintain bingeing because persons suffering from Eating Disorders believe they can binge and later undo the effects of the binge with purging, exercise, laxatives, and diuretics. Bingeing also leads to continued dieting, and dieting causes hunger, low weight, further bingeing, and more dieting.

Explanation: Famine Brain

FACT: Your brain is an astonishingly complex and powerful instrument specifically designed to keep you from losing weight. Your ancestors survived and reproduced because their bodies were incredibly good at conserving fuel as they survived from cave to cave, seeking edible grubs and possible mates, all unthinkingly, without a single McDonalds within walking distance.

FACT: Because it is an evolutionary imperative, eating is highly rewarding on many levels. Our brains are so attuned to starvation that consuming food causes not only physical satiety, but psychological payoffs. Not eating food makes us hungry, but it also makes us afraid.

FACT: The only natural conditions under which a wild animal will go hungry while exercising strenuously are emergencies - predator attacks, famine, or natural disasters.

FACT: Such emergency conditions “turn on” all our psychological and physical responses to stress. This means that dietary restriction and strenuous exercise, especially in combination, cause the brain to fixate on finding food and comfort, while pumping out hormones that signal to the body to lay in supplies by becoming sedentary and becoming fat. (Incidentally, this constant bath of hormones also leads to a host of awful degenerative diseases.)

FACT: As very socially dependent beings, we get massively stressed out not only by predators and diseases, but also by social conditions such as negative judgment, loss of status, disapproval, and so on. Such factors have been shown to cause sharp rises in stress hormones among various social primates (baboons, chimpanzees, Britney Spears, etc.).

FACT: Sustaining this kind of stress by setting up constraints and expectations that make you even more panicky about keeping your dietary rules triggers your body’s famine responses. These responses are far stronger than conscious intention. They are your Survivor instincts: ultimately, they will outwit, outlast, and outplay your attempts to diet by willpower.

FACT: If you increase the pressure to lose weight by swearing before God to go hungry forever, promising on Oprah that you'll drop the pounds, or telling your boyfriend he can dump you if you get above a certain weight, you escalate your stress responses until they make you want to eat everything in the nearest Kentucky outlet, including the cashier. They will also cause your personality to change, much as Linda Blair's character changed in *The Exorcist*.

In short, courting all this stress is absolutely, positively guaranteed to cause "Famine brain," the state of mind that is the polar opposite of the state of mind you need to live in your body permanently and peacefully. You simply can't outwit Mother Nature.

Exercise: *The Watcher, The Dictator, and The Wild Child*

You are already overly familiar with the set of controlling, bitter thoughts with which your mind tries to lash you to various weight-loss regimens. These words, like all verbal thinking, are produced by the computer-self. You are also very familiar with the way your creature-self reacts, by panicking and breaking the rules. We'll now picture these rulemaking and rule breaking parts of you as humans. Tiny humans. We'll call them the Dictator and the Wild Child.

The instructions below may feel odd, but I want you to follow them anyway because of the way they affect your brain. First, hold out your right hand, palm up. Imagine a tiny version of yourself in a military uniform, with a whip in one hand and a gun in the other, stomping around in your palm, shrieking deeply personal insults and commanding you to lose weight. This is the Dictator. Now hold up your left palm and picture your Wild Child there: very small, dressed in skins and bark, covered with scars, waiting for an opportunity to escape or subvert the Dictator's brutal control. Watch until you can see them both clearly in your mind's eye.

Now, while watching these two mini-you's, I want you to see that as dysfunctional as they may be, both of them are essentially good. The Dictator wants you to be healthy and beautiful. It gets frantic about your weight for the same reason you might freak out if you saw a beloved pet wandering into traffic. It screams and yells, pens you in or drags you around - anything to keep you from a horrible fate. On the other hand, the Wild Child is the part of you that evolved to avoid starvation and captivity. It panics when the Dictator berates, shames, and tries to control it. It knows the Dictator is planning to starve it. So, it's not surprising that the instant the Dictator is weakened by stress, hunger, or environmental chaos, the Wild Child leaps into action and eats like a junkyard dog.

Think through the well-meaning motivations of both your Dictator and your Wild Child, until you really understand that within their limited perspectives, they're doing their very best. Then offer them both kindnesses. One useful method is to silently repeat these phrases from the classic "loving kindness" meditation: "May you be well. May you be happy. May you be free from suffering." It may also help to set the book aside for a moment and close your eyes. Continue offering these good wishes while visualizing both the Wild Child and the Dictator until you genuinely mean it, until you can feel compassion toward both sides of yourself. When you get there, consider the following question:

WHO ARE YOU?

The only reason you can "see" and offer kindness to both Dictator and Wild Child is that you're not either of them. You've moved into a third realm of consciousness, which resides, literally, in a different part of your brain. Call it the Watcher.

This is a subtle transition. You may feel it as a slight sense of loosening and relief, the psychological equivalent of taking off a tight, itchy piece of clothing. Or it might feel revolutionary, an epiphany that changes you permanently the first time you feel it. I've often seen people who do this exercise and begin to cry - and these are individuals who've been through 17 kinds of hell without shedding a tear. It's as if an enormous, invisible, powerful creature has slipped soundlessly into the room and settled itself against the wall.

You may not feel this at first, or it may be so inconspicuous that you don't even notice it. Just persist with the exercise, offering the Dictator and Wild Child best wishes for at least a full minute at a time. When you can clearly imagine both sides of your dieting self, without identifying completely with either of them, consider another question:

HOLDING THIS MENTAL POSITION, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT FOOD?

While both the Dictator and Wild Child make you want to overeat, you Watcher self is not nearly as compulsive. It doesn't feel either rigidly controlled or totally out-of-control. In fact, according to some medical psychologists, its physiologically impossible for your mind to stay locked in a war of control when you're engaging its ability to generate compassion and appreciation. It is a place of inner peace. Since it's also the only mindset from which you can make yourself an effortlessly slim person, you can call it "the place of (Th)inner Peace." It is actually the sensation of your brain releasing anxiety.

Learning to access the place of Inner Peace is the most important healthy eating skill in the history of the universe. You can attempt to deploy incredible discipline, white-knuckle will-power, using the Dictator to trap, dominate, and starve your Wild Child self, but this strategy simply can't be maintained. It's as draining as keeping a violent criminal pinned to the floor with sheer force. But even if you manage to do it, you can't hold your own Wild Child in a hammerlock for the rest of your life. The minute you get tired, distracted, or sick, the Dictator loses control, and the Wild Child goes into a feeding frenzy. This is an inevitable reality, based on the way your brain and body are designed.

The deceptively quiet power of this brain-shifting strategy has made it a favourite of meditators. Stepping back from the Dictator and the Wild Child and becoming the Watcher is like thinking you've been stuck on a railway track, able to move only backward and forward, and discovering that you had the ability to fly all along. Even if this initially feels like only a tiny hop off the tracks, it can be the beginning of a whole new life. Becoming a Watcher is a skill you'll want to use daily, or even several times a day, once you master it.

Breaking the Cycle

This is the cycle that ensnares you: 1) Strict dieting, 2) Low weight, 3) Bingeing, and 4) Compensatory behaviours. Each component of the cycle is a cause of and is caused by the other three components. In order to disrupt this pathological system, treatment focuses on six main goals.

Goal #1: Begin by replacing strict dieting with normal eating.

Goal #2: Overcome resistance to normal eating.

Goal #3: Control bingeing and purging.

Goal #4: Change negative body image

Goal #5: Develop new sources of self-esteem.

Goal #6: Address the eating disorder mindset.

Goal #1: Begin by Replacing Strict Dieting with Normal Eating

You should follow six guidelines:

1. **Eat 3 meals plus 2 snacks every day.** (Anorexic patients should eat three meals plus three snacks.) The meals may be very small, but patients should eat at no other times. The goal is to establish a regular eating pattern. Once a pattern of 3 meals + 2 or 3 snacks is established, gradually increase the amounts eaten.

2. **You should decide what to eat.** As long as what's chosen resembles a real meal or snack, any reasonable choice is a good choice. (A diet soda is not a snack.)
3. **Each day, you should make a detailed plan of what, when, and where you will eat.** Without a precise plan, it's easy to "forget" to follow the 3 meal + 2 or 3 snack guidelines, or be unable to decide what to eat, or not have appropriate food on hand.
4. **Immediately after you eat, you should record when and what you've eaten.** If you don't keep good food records, you'll forget and/or distort what you've eaten by the time of your therapy appointment. You should never record the number of calories or the precise amounts you eat. This is not "normal" eating. You should record "a glass of juice," not "250ml of juice."
5. **You should weigh yourself only once a week.** It doesn't matter who does the weekly weighing, but it should always occur at the same time and place. Weekly weighing enables both the therapist and the patient to track progress. Anorexics must gain weight. Other ED patients must learn that normal eating does not cause weight gain. This is a crucial concept that you will only accept after you change your eating behaviour and see that you don't gain weight.
6. **Introduce forbidden foods, but only after you are comfortable following the 3 meals + 2 or 3 snacks plan.** Avoiding "forbidden foods" reinforces overconcern with shape and weight and contributes to craving and bingeing. Introducing forbidden food into your diet counteracts strict dieting and the fear of becoming fat. When introducing forbidden foods:
 - a. **Choose what forbidden food to eat** but eat only small amounts.
 - b. **Plan when and where to eat the food**, making certain that the situation is not stressful. If the situation is, you are likely to binge.
 - c. **Remember that the forbidden food will not be a part of your regular diet.**

EXERCISE: THE 10-MINUTE VACATION FROM PREDATION

Overeating is a self-calming behaviour that's triggered by resistance - your resistance to your body's appetites, its resistance to your attempts at controlling it. You can't ask a prey animal to stop being afraid when it feels threatened - everything in its nature makes that impossible. Remember, I'm not just comparing your overeating self to a prey animal, I'm telling you it literally is one. If you want it to cooperate with you, you must start by helping it to feel safe. At least once a day follow these instructions:

1. Find a safe space where you can be uninterrupted for at least 10 minutes.

Hints:

- Choose a time when you're not hungry. Right after stuffing your face is a good opportunity; your body's animal fear of being hungry will be at a low point.
- Find a place where you can be physically comfortable. You can sit down or lie down if you like, or it may feel good to move. If so, choose a mindless activity like walking or knitting, rather than something that demands attention, such as cat burglary.
- Make sure you are also psychologically comfortable. During the time when I was alternatively starving or bingeing, I sometimes felt safest when I was running or riding bicycle, which allowed me to obey my "flight" instincts. Nowadays, I get the same comfort from yoga exercises.
- If possible, find a spot where no one can see you, including you (don't sit facing a reflective surface). Being watched makes prey animals very, very, uncomfortable.
- Your safe zone should be a place where there's no food visible or readily available. Ideally, it will be a place where nobody eats, ever. At this point of your psychological development, food may confuse or overwhelm your instinctive self.
- Keep experimenting until you find a place where your most nervous, paranoid subconscious prey animal can feel as secure as possible. This is the equivalent of taking a horse into the round pen, where it can both run and feel protected by the walls.

2. Stop attacking your body and start supporting it. Beating up on yourself when you're already out of control will only leave you emotionally bruised, more crazed, and ultimately fatter. If you want to get comfortable with your body and food, you must drop your predator behaviour. That means being supportive, rather than aggressive, toward your body. It won't come naturally at first. You may feel ridiculous. I don't care. Fake it. After you've established a safe place, breathe as deeply and evenly as you can. On each out-breath, tell yourself one or more of the following mantras (you can say them out loud, or do it silently).

- Everything is okay.
- I don't have to do one single thing for the next 10 minutes.
- I can handle this moment, and I don't have to handle anything else.
- My body has suffered a lot. It deserves understanding, not cruelty.
- In the grand scheme of things, how much I eat, or weigh matters much less than being kind. I will start by being kind to my body.

- Struggling not to be the person I am right now is pointless and useless.
 - If I never changed a thing, the world would keep revolving.
 - It's alright to rest.
3. Wait for signs that body is ready to "join up" with you. If you keep silently repeating these thoughts - even if you don't mean them at first - you'll eventually notice a response in your body. It will signal its readiness to accept you as its herd mate with physical cues, like a horse that feels safe enough to join up. Look for observable signs of the "relaxation response":
- Deep, regular, easy breathing; a sensation of opening in your airway.
 - Muscle relaxation, especially in your torso, neck, and shoulders. The space between your shoulders and the crown of your head lengthening.
 - Brief spells of laughing or crying (either of these can happen when our fear levels go down; both are ways the body may use to get out of a "fight or flight" response).
 - Sleepiness.
 - A sense of emotional quiet and peace.
 - The taste in your mouth becomes less bitter, more sweet or salty (stress hormones, along with putting fat on you, make your saliva taste bitter).

This skill is its own reward, since it gives you a reprieve from any anxiety or stress you feel in everyday life. It's also the foundation of every healthy eating strategy, since the fight-or-flight response is what knocks us out of our rational intentions and goads us into overeating, against our better judgment. If you teach yourself to relax regularly, you can trust that your body won't freak out as long as you remain focused on calmly experiencing the present moment. Then the instinctive self can stop kicking, rearing, and biting - biting flan, peanut brittle, pork rinds....

Goal #2: Overcome Resistance to Normal Eating.

You will feel resistance toward giving up strict dieting. Here are four techniques that will help you accept the goal of learning to eat normally:

1. [See the 3 meals plus 2 or 3 snacks plan as a way to gain control of eating.](#) You already realize that you have lost control of your eating and your life.
2. [Keep in mind the relationship among bingeing, purging, and calorie restriction.](#) (Remember the chart above.) This provides a rationale for CBT treatment. Remembering the deleterious health effects of calorie restriction, extreme weight loss, vomiting, and diuretic/laxative abuse provides further motivation for change.

3. **Make changes slowly and take an empirical approach to change.** Do behavioural experiments. Try the 3 meals + 2 or 3 snacks plan for one week to see if you gain any weight. When you don't, consider continuing the experiment for a second week.
4. **Keep on talking to your therapist, and don't lose heart or give up** when you slip up. Progress is always intermittent, and motivation must be continually renewed.

EXERCISE: SENSATION INTERPRETATION

1. Start by doing your "10-minute vacation from predation" and establish a good, strong relaxation response. Its best to do this when you've eaten, because to do this exercise, you need to go without food for the next 15 minutes. Trying to go forward without getting to the point where your body starts to relax is like trying to pour water when its frozen solid. You can only "melt" your rigid dietary habits by relaxing.
2. Describe, in very precise words, the sensations in your hands and feet. We're starting with hands and feet because they're the parts of the body that usually frighten chubby people the least. Even so, you may be so used to ignoring your body's sensations that his simple-sounding task is actually quite difficult. If you can't feel anything, touch a few different objects: your shirt, your head, a chair. Describe in words the sensations you feel. Try:
 - Temperature words (hot, cold, lukewarm, room temperature, absolute zero).
 - Texture words (smooth, rough, nubby, scratchy, silky, mushy).
 - Shape words (sharp, rounded, angular, pointy, cylindrical).
 - Discomfort words (achy, itchy, tired, sore, raw, cramped).
3. Allow your attention to travel up your arms and legs, though your torso and head. Describe, in words, the physical feelings you observe in your body as a whole. This may take a while, and you might feel different things in different parts of your body. Describe all of them. For example, I notice that my head feels groggy, my neck and shoulders are extremely tight, and I have a slightly nauseated feeling in the pit of my stomach. I'm warm but not uncomfortably so. Other than that, I feel kind of floppy and relaxed. Your natural tendency may be to screen out much of the discomfort you feel, or to focus grimly on pain without noticing good feelings. Allowing both good and bad sensations into consciousness, without resistance, is essential to developing a healthy relationship to your body.

4. Remaining relaxed, describe what you are feeling emotionally. If you can't tell, return your attention to the least comfortable part of your body. Breathe into the discomfort. Allow it to get bigger. Continue this until you sense the emotion connected to the discomfort (there will be one). Describe that emotion in words.

If I focus on the sensation in my neck and shoulders, I feel ... wait a second, its coming to me ... give me time ... huh. Frustration, almost mild anger, because I have to go to a dentist appointment in half an hour, and I'd rather keep writing. I didn't know I was feeling frustration until this minute, but there it is.

By the way, if you're like my most difficult clients, you may be thinking that this is touchy-feely pop-psych New Age folderol way beneath your intelligence, and they you'll just skip over this particular exercise. If so, I'll tell you which emotion you're feeling: fear.

Emotion terrifies your computer mind, and if you habitually resist acknowledging painful emotions, you've got a motherload of unfelt feelings bottled up. Notice that you're not creating these feelings by paying attention to them. You're just tapping the powder keg you carry around all the time. As you become aware of your emotional state, you may cry, shake, scream, yell, point your tiny royal fists. Too damn bad. If you want to get comfortable in your skin, you'll do this step.

5. Breathe deeply, relax, and notice that on a purely physical level, you're not hungry. You may have just connected with terrible sadness over bygone circumstances, such as the premature death of your pet goat, or the excessive longevity of your in-laws. In response to those deep, difficult, painful experiences, I would say to you - and I mean this sincerely: Yea, yeah, whatever.

Does this shock you? I care very much about your emotions, but I also want you to know that having them doesn't necessarily mean you have to eat. There are other ways to find comfort. At this stage in the process of becoming a comfortably slender person, its only necessary to disentangle the sensations of emotional pain and genuine physical hunger. If you want to eat anyway, just sit with that urge of the 10 minutes it takes to do this exercise. After that, you can eat anything you want.

This may take some time if you're a slow learner like me. I have two doctorates, I have studied psychology for decades, and it still takes me at least a minute of focused attention to know whether or not I'm physically hungry.

The more time you've spent totally identified with your mind, the more difficult it can be to "hear" what your body is saying. Keep paying attention until you can give your hunger level a score between 0 and 10. Zero means you're feeling no hunger at all, and 10 meaning you're starving.

Repeat this exercise at least three times a day for at least four days, as you're getting dressed in the morning, during a break while doing mindless labour in the middle of the day, and when you go to sleep at night. Notice the different sensations in your gut.

Goal #3: Control Bingeing and Purging.

Once relatively normal eating resumes, bingeing ends or diminishes greatly. When bingeing ends, the need for compensatory behaviours also ends. Residual bingeing or purging rarely occurs more than twice a week. Residual bingeing and purging are controlled by negative moods or interpersonal difficulties, not hunger. Initially, you may not be aware of these mood and interpersonal precipitants. Gradually, you will come to understand the variables that control your residual binges and purges by repeatedly doing a thorough assessment of the specific events, cognitions, and emotions that precede and follow residual binges or purges. Keep records or a diary for the following purposes:

1. **To learn about controlling antecedents**, ask yourself about the setting in which the binge or purge occurred, the events that precipitated the decision to binge or purge, the actions that you took between the decision and the binge or purge, and the thoughts and feelings you experienced at each point in the chain of events preceding the binge or purge.
2. **To learn about the consequences and reinforcement** of the binge or purge, ask yourself about what you did afterwards. How did you feel as a result? What did the binge or purge accomplish? Once you have a narrative of the events leading up to and following a binge or purge, we use traditional CB techniques to find more adaptive ways to cope with negative moods and interpersonal difficulties. For negative moods I could suggest:
 - a. Activities that alter your mood without doing harm - listening to music, talking to friends, taking a warm bath or a cold shower.
 - b. Learning to accept negative moods with mindfulness skills or by saying "this bad mood will pass" or "I can tolerate this."
 - c. General psychotherapy. Communication training, family therapy, or couples' therapy may improve interpersonal difficulties.

EXERCISE: BEATING THE BINGE MONSTER

1. Start by doing your "10-minute vacation from predation" and establish a good, strong relaxation response. Get to a safe place; breathe, notice your physical sensations, then emotional ones. Repeat affirmations like, "I don't have to do anything now," until you can accept what you are feeling for this moment. Keep deepening your breathing and acceptance until you feel your muscles relax.
2. Recall a recent occasion when you overate - the more out-of-control, the better for practicing your new self-calming skills. Jot a few words here to remind yourself of the incident (for example, "At Joe's bar mitzvah," or "2 a.m. this morning.")
3. In memory, walk through the experience of the binge. Recall as much as you can about the setting, what you were feeling physically, and how the binge played out. As you remember, notice any changes in your breathing, muscle tension, and body position. You may flinch or get extremely fidgety. Do not run away or stop the exercise. Breathe in, exhale, and continue to relax with the memory still in your mind.
4. As you watch the memory of your binge, notice what you were feeling emotionally. You may actually re-experience some of the emotions that drove your binge, such as anxiety, anger, sadness, or manic excitement. Watch them without moving. Notice that your Wild Child was trying to heal or express itself by overeating.
5. Now focus on the shame or self-loathing you felt once the eating finally stopped. Listen to the abusive or hopeless things you've said to yourself in this state of remorseful regret. Feel the anxiety that drove your self-accusations. Notice that this is your inner Dictator, and that it is well-meaning but counterproductive. It only makes the Wild Child feel even more misunderstood, abused, and disconsolate.
6. For six full breaths, detach from the Wild Child and the Dictator by picturing both, simultaneously, and offering them kind wishes: "May you be well. May you be happy. May you be free from suffering." Notice that as you identify with the Watcher, your anger at yourself for bingeing, and the fear that you will binge again, become less intense. As you practice this exercise repeatedly, you'll find that the effect can be dramatic, quick, and incredibly calming.

7. Replay the scene of the binge one more time, observing it as the Watcher and offering kindness to your bingeing self the entire time. Continue until you can remain physically relaxed with the memory in your mind. If you can, imagine being in the same situation without eating, using kindness to nourish a state of calm relaxation.
8. Stay in this relaxed state for 5 minutes or as long as you can, whichever arrives first.

EXERCISE: TRASH THE TREASURE INSTEAD OF TREASURING THE TRASH

Explanation: when opportunity knocks, lock the door.

You were born, bred, and conditioned to be what biologists call an opportunistic eater. Dogs are opportunistic eaters compelled by scent, which is why a dog can inhale a family-size pizza one minute and the next minute swear on a stack of Bibles he's starving, really, really starving. Snakes are opportunistic eaters attracted to the heat of warm-blooded animals, which is why a boa constrictor in Ketchum, Idaho, had to undergo surgery after eating - this is true - a queen-size electric blanket. Human bodies are geared to eat opportunistically when we see, smell, or even think about something yummy.

Opportunistic eaters, especially those who have experienced some form of deprivation (dieting), experience intense resistance when it comes to letting tasty items go to waste. Don't let that brownie just sit there! Don't throw it away! Think of the children starving in the Sudan! News flash: Starving Sudanese children remain stubbornly unrelieved while someone in Des Moines attains the physical dimensions of a walrus. If you want to show your gratitude for the abundance in which you live, start by teaching your brain to accept that abundance. Then go to that internal balance point, the one that allows you to eat exactly as much as your body needs to be its healthiest.

To be a slim person indefinitely, you must reframe your whole perception of wasting food. Food is wasted when a diabetic eats it, gets sicker, and loses a limb. It's wasted when it clogs the arteries, raises your blood pressure, and causes heart attack or a stroke. If you're swallowing food you don't need, packing it on as fat, every molecule that makes you less healthy rather than healthier is wasted, especially if you're going to end up throwing it up into the toilet anyway.

A crucial step in unlocking the patterned responses and cravings that cause you to overeat is learning to discard food when you don't need it. In fact, this is so important in reconfiguring your habitual responses that I suggest you always leave food on your plate. If you're really so hungry that you physically need every bit of food in front of you, go get a refill just so you'll have a little something to throw away.

THROWING AWAY FOOD WHEN YOU'RE TOO FULL TO EAT IT IS NOT WASTEFUL. IT IS WASTEFUL TO EAT THAT FOOD - ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE GOING TO END UP THROWING IT UP INTO THE TOILET - THEREBY CAUSING YOURSELF TO BECOME A SICK PERSON.

This exercise is a skill you might use daily for the rest of your life, possibly at every meal. It may appal the spirits of your perpetually hungry ancestors, but in today's world, it's an essential tool for staying healthy.

LEARNING TO TRASH THE TREASURE

1. Wait until you're hungry, then get a whole bunch of very righteous food.

By very righteous food I mean something inexpensive and very good for you, like salad or boiled vegetables. You're choosing inexpensive food, so it'll be less painful to bid farewell to it, as I'm just about to ask you to do. You're choosing righteous food because it's almost certainly the food choice you aren't making right now, although you feel you should be, and you don't find it terribly appealing. Make sure you prepare more food than you really want to eat. Put a huge serving of the very righteous food on a plate, then sit down and get ready to eat.

2. Become the peaceful Watcher.

Before you eat, centre yourself. Tune in to your physical sensations, then your emotions. Watch your thoughts. Observe what your Wild Child is thinking and feeling, then what's going on with the inner Dictator. Offer them both loving thoughts ("May you be well, may you be happy, may you be free of suffering") until you feel connected to the Watcher. Now turn your attention to the very righteous food and observe it from the position of the Watcher. Strangely enough, you may notice that the food now seems more appetizing than it did when you first sat down.

3. Eat some of the very righteous food, watching you own sensations, until you're satisfied.

Notice everything you feel and think as you eat. Spend some time chewing the food, observing its taste, texture, and temperature. Notice how it feels to swallow and how your stomach reacts once the food reaches it. Rank your fullness level with every bite, with 0 signifying "hungry," and 10 signifying "stuffed to the gills." Eat this way (it's a common mindfulness meditation) until you feel a sense of physical satiation. You want your hunger level to get to about 8 - not stuffed, but definitely satisfied.

4. Throw away the remaining very righteous food.

Remain in the place of the Watcher as you throw away the food. Watch the Dictator freak out: "You're being wasteful!" and marvel that this is the very same part of you that's always criticizing you for eating too much. See if your Wild Child feels emotionally starved and abandoned or wants to keep eating just for eating's sake or becomes desolate over starvation overseas. From the Watcher's calm perspective, remind all parts of yourself that throwing away this particular excess of righteous food is the most sensible thing you can do. Adopt an orphan, if you must, but learn to see that eating food you don't really want is actually less helpful to the world than throwing it away, because it's making you less helpful to the world.

5. Wait until the next time you're hungry and repeat the whole process with moderately righteous food.

Depending on your tastes and mores, moderately righteous food might be mashed potatoes, presweetened cereal, red meat, scrambled eggs, lasagne, see, things are starting to get interesting. Be very careful to eat slowly and remain mindful of your physical sensations while you eat – now that we're talking about wicked food, you're in much more danger of going off the rails and mindlessly stuffing yourself.

It will also be harder to deal with your anxiety about throwing away the food that still remains when your gut hunger is not satisfied. It may help to tell your Wild Child that the next time you get hungry, you will get more of this food and eat it again. But continue doing this exercise with moderately wicked food until you can stop eating when satisfied but are not stuffed and throw away the leftovers without panicking.

6. Wait until the next time you're hungry and repeat the whole process with extremely wicked food.

You know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about That Food, the dish you can't stop eating and would never, ever, throw away - except that now you're going to stop eating it and throw it away when you've had enough to satisfy your hunger. Again, if you find yourself panicking, reassure your Wild Child that there is plenty of extremely wicked food available and that you can have some more the next time you get hungry.

Remember that, in general, you'll do well to save leftover food and cache it for later. But right now, the emphasis is on learning to leave food uneaten, then throw it away.

Even good food. Even tasty, expensive food. Even food your adorable Italian grandmother whipped up with her own meaty forearms. Try trashing at least some food after every meal and make it a habit.

This is a stepwise change; once you've gotten over the threshold, you'll be far more able to tune into actual hunger and satiety cues, which will tell you the real amount nature meant you to eat at any given meal. Think of me as your coach who sits by your elbow, cheering you on as you throw away food you never wanted. Deciding how many orphans to adopt - well, that's up to you.

Goal #4: Change Negative Body Image.

Negative body image has many cognitive and behavioural manifestations: "feeling fat"; comparing oneself to others; compulsive checking of weight or shape (e.g. mirror checking); and avoidance of information about weight and shape (e.g. mirror avoidance). Many of these are subtle and easy to overlook, but each reinforces overconcern with weight and shape, and each should be a target of therapeutic intervention.

1. **"Feeling fat" is not a feeling.** "Feeling fat" is a belief or self-criticism. Notice when you experience this "feeling" intensely and observe the "feeling" during the week. Get lots of details about each individual experience: What were you doing, thinking, and feeling when you "felt fat"? What was going on in the environment? Who was present? What led up to the "feeling"?

Persons with Eating Disorders are seldom aware of the psychology that creates "feeling fat." Repeated inquiry is usually required before you may recognize that "feeling fat" typically occurs in one of two situations:

- a. **When you suppress emotions** such as feeling embarrassed or discouraged;
- b. **When you misinterpret ordinary physical sensations:** when you're squeezing into clothes that are too small, or when you sit down and notice the rounding of your belly.

As you learn to experience rather than suppress your emotions, you can recognize "feeling fat" as an emotion or a physical sensation. Correctly recognizing emotions and physical sensations enables you to respond in more appropriate ways than dieting, bingeing, or purging.

2. **Stop compulsive checking whenever it occurs.** People who suffer from Eating Disorders frequently check their shape and weight. They compulsively weigh themselves, glance sideways in mirrors to make sure their stomachs are flat, or surreptitiously pinch themselves to make sure they haven't suddenly become fat. They also obsessively compute the number of calories they've consumed each day and compare themselves to celebrities and/or every person they meet.

Checking reinforces overconcern with shape and weight, and maintains continued dieting, bingeing, and purging. Response prevention strategies disrupt checking compulsions and can weaken this overconcern with shape and weight. Here are some response prevention techniques:

- a. **Give your scale to a trusted friend or family member.** You should be getting weighed once a week at the same time and place (such as your therapist's office), so you have no need for a scale.
 - b. **Use mirrors appropriately** – only to fix your hair or put on make-up before going out.
 - c. **Record each instance of compulsive checking.** Self-monitoring reduces dysfunctional behaviours, including compulsive checking.
3. **Overcome shape avoidance.** Some sufferers avoid mirrors; others undress in the dark, wear baggy clothes, or avoid social situations where their bodies might be on display (e.g. the beach). Being able to look at and touch your body, letting others do the same, and making an objective appraisal of your appearance are important components of treatment success. Exposure - normal observation of your body - is the first step. Cognitive and acceptance interventions are additional techniques for weakening overconcern with shape and weight.

EXERCISE: LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF

This activity will be done in the quiet of your own mind. Part of the power of this exercise is learning what your resistances are to love yourself. For some people, it is the nagging inner critic who says no to every positive idea they have. For others, their resistance comes at the body level, in the form of tension or pain. Still others experience sleepiness, boredom, or a wandering mind when faced with the possibility of loving themselves. There are no right answers to this exercise; just notice what happens to you. If you stick with it long enough to get past your resistance, you may have very positive experiences. Some of my clients have reported the following reactions:

"I felt my chest open and I began to really breathe for the first time."

"I felt a warm light rush up the sides of my face."

"... it was like being at the fulcrum of life."

"I had a gentle, peaceful light streaming over my head. I didn't want to come back. I could have stayed there for ever."

INSTRUCTIONS

Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Rest inside for about a minute.

Say "I love myself unconditionally" in your mind. Pause for about ten seconds, then repeat this phrase. Continue repeating it, with a ten second pause between repetitions, until you have repeated it fifteen to twenty times.

During the pause between repetitions, notice what happens in your mind and body. What thoughts spontaneously arise? What body sensations occur? Simply notice your reactions to the phrase, "I love myself unconditionally."

After fifteen to twenty repetitions, rest quietly for a minute, then open your eyes.

Note your reactions in your notebook and discuss them with your therapist.

EXERCISE: RITUAL FOR LOVING YOUR BODY

It's become a habit to see what needs to be changed about yourself. You're waiting (weighting) for perfection before you'll love yourself completely. You can change these self-critical tapes by looking at what you like about yourself and giving yourself positive feedback.

If you have trouble appreciating yourself, start by looking at others who have the same qualities you have and admire them. Rebecca considered herself ten kilos overweight and was continually putting herself down for the way she looked. She felt the only way she could possibly like herself would be if she were thin. Because she could not see her own beauty, she thought she's start by looking at women who had a similar body type and learn to appreciate them. She started to see how beautiful other "overweight" women were and noticed how sensual and alive they looked. She started complimenting others on their looks. By doing this, she could look at her own body in a new way. She began to accept and appreciate herself. Her body responded to this approval with more life and energy. She gradually lost a few kilos and has continued to appreciate her body as it is.

INSTRUCTIONS

Stand naked in front of a full-length mirror. Send positive thoughts to every part of your body. Even if you don't like your body, or don't approve of certain parts of your body, look for something of beauty in every part of yourself. Realize that your body has been serving you faithfully for years. Thank your body for its service.

For example, you might say to yourself, "You have beautiful, thick, shiny hair." Then look in the mirror at your hair and see its beauty, its shine and glow - even if it isn't shining and glowing as much as you'd like. Continue to appreciate yourself as you are, saying, "I love the way you look. You have beautiful hands. You have strong healthy legs. You have clear skin. You have shining eyes."

Run through each part of your body in this way and really send it love and appreciation. Find a way to appreciate every part of yourself. And thank your body for being with you for however many years, following your desires and serving you. It has been doing what you have asked of it. If you like, you can play music that you love, and use candles and flowers while performing this ritual. Do this ritual once or twice a day for at least two weeks.

This ritual shows your body how much you appreciate and respect it. Your body has been criticized, judged, rejected, and punished by you for years. It will respond quickly to love and energy. You will feel lighter and more energized. You will start looking more beautiful. The lines in your face will relax. You will start to glow with strength and health. You will be amazed at the results of loving your body.

EXERCISE: LIST ALL THE WAYS YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING (WEIGHTING)

1. List all the ways you see yourself waiting (weighting). What are you waiting to say, do, have, or become?
2. Next to each item on the list, write down how you can take action. What can you do to change the waiting into saying, doing, or having what you want now?

Goal #5: Develop New Sources of Self-Esteem.

ED patients evaluate themselves exclusively by their shape and weight. Ultimately, this is a futile enterprise. Low weight is difficult to maintain, and a perfect shape is impossible for all but a few. Beginning to exercise moderately, eat a healthy diet, and accepting your shape and weight alleviates low self-esteem and the unsatisfying focus on shape and weight.

Treatment should also help you answer this question: "If I can't change my basic shape, what can I change that will make me happier?" Becoming involved with new interests, learning new skills, and developing better relationships compete with and reduce overconcern with shape and weight.

EXERCISE: AFFIRMATION OF SELF-LOVE

Learn this extended affirmation by heart and repeat it silently or out loud every time you find your mind beginning to dwell on food, your appearance, your shape or weight.

DEEP AT THE CENTRE OF MY BEING THERE IS AN INFINITE WELL OF LOVE

I now allow this love to flow to the **surface**. It fills my heart, my body, my mind, my consciousness, **my very being**, and radiates out from me in all directions and returns to me **multiplied**. The more love I use and give, the more I have to give, the **supply is endless**. The use of love makes **ME FEEL GOOD**; it is an expression of my inner joy.

I love myself; therefore, I **take care of my body**. I lovingly feed it nourishing foods and beverages, I lovingly groom it and dress it, and my body lovingly responds to me with **vibrant health and energy**.

I love myself; therefore, I provide for myself a **comfortable home**, one that fills all my needs and is a pleasure to be in. I fill the rooms with the vibration of love so that all who enter, myself included, will **feel this love and be nourished by it**.

I love myself; therefore, I work at a **job that I truly enjoy** doing, one that uses my creative talents and abilities, working with and for people that I love and that love me, and earning a **good income**.

I love myself; therefore, I **behave and think in a loving way** to all people for I know that that which I give out **returns to me multiplied**. I only attract **loving people** in my world for they are a mirror of what I am. I love myself; therefore, I **forgive** and totally release the past and all past experiences and I am free.

I love myself; therefore, I live totally in the now, **experiencing each moment** as good and knowing that my future is bright and **joyous and secure**, for I am a **beloved child of the universe and the universe lovingly takes care of me now and forevermore**.

AND SO IT IS

Goal #6: Address the Eating Disorder Mindset.

ED cognitions, behaviours, and emotions are components of a pathological, self-reinforcing system. But healthy cognitions, behaviours, and emotions about shape and weight create an opposing system. As treatment progresses, your healthy cognitions, behaviours, and emotions about shape and weight become stronger, but you may remain vulnerable to relapse into the ED mindset for a long time.

You will learn to identify triggers for the ED mindset – negative events related to shape and weight (e.g. gaining weight, violating healthy eating rules), negative moods, or other upsetting events in your life. You need to learn to prepare yourself to act immediately when these triggers occur. Remembering the skills you learned in treatment and distracting yourself from ED thoughts prevent relapse into the ED cognitions, behaviours, and emotions that comprise the ED mindset.

MEDITATION FOR RELEASING OLD PATTERNS

Sit or lie down, relax, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. As you exhale, imagine that you are letting go of everything that you don't want or need. Easily, without effort, let any frustrations, tiredness, or worries melt away. This is a time to release an old way of life that no longer works for you. Imagine that your old ways, your old patterns, and all the obstacles to achieving what you truly want are gently dissolved and leaving your body with each breath. Every time you exhale, and release a little of your old limitations, you create more space inside of you for something new.

After doing this for a few minutes, begin to imagine that every time you inhale you are breathing in life energy, the life force of the universe. Within this life energy is everything you need and desire - love, power, wealth, beauty, strength, abundance. Breathe it in with each inhalation.

Imagine a new way of life opening up, filling you with aliveness, vitality, and energy. Pretend your life is exactly the way you want it to be. Imagine this new life is here, now, and savour it.

When the meditation feels complete, gently open your eyes and come back into the room. See if you can retain that sense of newness in yourself. Remember that you are now in the process of creating a new life for yourself.

Helping A Person with Bulimia

If you suspect that your friend or family member has bulimia, talk to the person about your concerns. Your loved one may deny bingeing and purging, but there's a chance that he or she will welcome the opportunity to open up about the struggle. Either way, bulimia should never be ignored. The person's physical and emotional health is at stake.

It's painful to know your child or someone you love may be bingeing and purging. You can't force a person with an eating disorder to change and you can't do the work of recovery for your loved one. But you can help by offering your compassion, encouragement, and support throughout the treatment process.

If your loved one has bulimia:

- **Offer compassion and support.** Keep in mind that the person may get defensive or angry. But if he or she does open up, listen without judgment and make sure the person knows you care.
- **Avoid insults, scare tactics, guilt trips, and patronizing comments.** Since bulimia is often caused and exacerbated by stress, low self-esteem, and shame, negativity will only make it worse.
- **Set a good example** for healthy eating, exercising, and body image. Don't make negative comments about your own body or anyone else's.
- **Accept your limits.** As a parent or friend, there isn't a lot you can do to "fix" your loved one's bulimia. The person with bulimia must make the decision to move forward.
- **Take care of yourself.** Know when to seek advice for yourself from a counsellor or health professional. Dealing with an eating disorder is stressful, and it will help if you have your own support system in place.

Helping a Loved One with an Eating Disorder

If you notice the warning signs of an eating disorder in a friend or family member, you may be hesitant to say anything out of fear that you're mistaken, or that you'll say the wrong thing, or you might alienate the person. Although it's undeniably difficult to bring up such a delicate subject, don't let these worries keep you from voicing valid concerns.

People with eating disorders are often afraid to ask for help. Some are struggling just as much as you are to find a way to start a conversation about their problem, while others have such low self-esteem, they simply don't feel that they deserve any help. Eating disorders will only get worse without treatment, and the physical and emotional damage can be severe. The sooner you start to help a loved one, the better their chances of recovery.

Talking to a Friend or Family Member About Their Eating Disorder

When approaching a loved one about an eating disorder, it's important to communicate your concerns in a loving and non-confrontational way. Pick a time when you can speak to the person in private, then explain why you're concerned. Try to remain positive, calm, focused, and respectful during conversations.

Your loved one may deny having an eating disorder or may become angry and defensive. However, it's important you don't give up. It may take some time before your loved one is willing to open up and admit to having a problem. Still, as difficult as it is to know that someone you love has an eating disorder, you cannot force someone to change. Unless it's a young child, the decision to seek recovery has to come from them. But you can help by making it clear that you'll continue to be there for him or her, with your compassion and support, whenever they're ready to tackle the problem.

How to Talk to Someone About Their Eating Disorder

Be careful to avoid critical or accusatory statements, as this will only bring out your friends or family member's defences. Instead, focus on the specific behaviours that worry you.

- **Focus on feelings and relationships**, not on weight and food. Share your memories of specific times when you felt concerned about the person's eating behaviour. Explain that you think these things may indicate that there could be a problem that needs professional help.
- **Tell them you are concerned about their health** but respect their privacy. Eating disorders are often a cry for help, and the individual will appreciate knowing that you are concerned.
- **Do not comment on how they look.** The person is already too aware of their body. Even if you are trying to compliment them, comments about weight or appearance only reinforce their obsession with body image and weight.
- **Make sure you do not convey any fat prejudice** or reinforce their desire to be thin. If they say they feel fat or want to lose weight, don't say "You're not fat." Instead, suggest they explore their fears about being fat, and what they think they can achieve by being thin.
- **Avoid power struggles about eating.** Do not demand that they change. Do not criticize their eating habits. People with eating disorders are trying to be in control. They don't feel in control of their life. Trying to trick or force them to eat can make things worse.
- **Avoid placing shame, blame, or guilt** on the person regarding their actions or attitudes. Do not use accusatory "you" statements like, "You just need to eat." Or, "You are acting irresponsibly." Instead, use "I" statements. For example: "I'm concerned about you because you refuse to eat breakfast or lunch." Or, "It makes me afraid to hear you vomiting."
- **Avoid giving simple solutions.** For example, "If you'd just stop, then everything would be fine!"

Helping Your Child with An Eating Disorder

Many kids with an eating disorder will react defensively and angrily when confronted for the first time. In addition to the health problems, kids who have an eating disorder are probably not having much fun. They tend to pull away from friends and keep to themselves, avoiding going out for pizza with their friends, for example, or enjoying a birthday party.

If you suspect your child has an eating disorder but he or she denies anything is wrong, book an appointment with their paediatrician or family doctor, or ask a school counsellor, religious leader, or trusted friend to help. Often kids find it easier to admit that they have a problem to someone outside of their immediate family. A doctor will also be able to determine if there are any signs of the serious health problems associated with an eating disorder. Also, eating disorder specialists are used to dealing with children who refuse to admit they have a problem. They are experienced dealing with denial and making a child feel comfortable talking about the problem.

Tips for Parents of A Child with An Eating Disorder

It can be deeply distressing for a parent to know that their child is struggling with an eating disorder. As well as ensuring your child receives the professional help he or she needs, here are some other tips:

- **Examine your own attitudes about food**, weight, body image and body size. Think about the way you personally are affected by body image pressures and share these with your child.
- **Avoid threats, scare tactics, angry outbursts, and put-downs.** Bear in mind that an eating disorder is often a symptom to extreme emotional pain and stress, an attempt to manage emotional pain, stress, and/or self-hate. Negative communication will only make it worse.
- **Set caring and consistent limits for your child.** For example, know how you will respond when your child wants to skip meals or eat alone, or when they get angry if someone eats their "special" food.
- **Remain firm.** Regardless of pleas to "not make me," and promises that the behaviour will stop, you have to stay very attuned to what is happening with your child and may have to force them to go to the doctor or the hospital. Keep in mind how serious eating disorders are.

- **Do whatever you can to promote self-esteem** in your child in intellectual, athletic, and social endeavours. Give boys and girls the same opportunities and encouragement. A well-rounded sense of self and solid self-esteem are perhaps the best antidotes to disordered eating.
- **Encourage your child to find healthy ways to manage unpleasant feelings** such as stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, or self-hatred.
- **Remember it's not your fault.** Parents often feel they must take on responsibility for the eating disorder, which is something they truly have no control over. Once you can accept that the eating disorder is not anyone's fault, you can be freed to take action that is honest and not clouded by what you "should" or "could" have done.

Seeking Professional Help

Aside from offering support, the most important thing you can do for a person with an eating disorder is to encourage treatment. The longer an eating disorder remains undiagnosed and untreated, the harder it is on the body and the more difficult to overcome, so urge your loved one to see a doctor right away.

A doctor can assess your loved one's symptoms, provide an accurate diagnosis, and screen for medical problems that might be involved. The doctor can also determine whether there are any co-existing conditions that require treatment, such as depression, substance abuse, or an anxiety disorder. If your friend or family member is hesitant to see a doctor, ask him or her to get a physical just to put your worries to rest. It may help if you offer to make the appointment or go along on the first visit.

Treatments for Eating Disorders

There are many treatment options for eating disorders. The right approach for each individual depends on his or her specific symptoms, issues, and strengths, as well as the severity of the disorder. To be most effective, treatment for an eating disorder must address both the physical and psychological aspects of the problem. The goal is to treat any medical or nutritional needs, promote a healthy relationship with food, and teach constructive ways to cope with life and its challenges.

Often, a combination of therapy, nutritional counselling, and group support works best. In some cases, residential treatment or hospitalization may be necessary.

- **Psychotherapy** – Therapy can help your loved one explore the issues underlying the eating disorder, improve self-esteem, and learn healthy ways of responding to stress and emotional pain. Family therapy is also effective for dealing with the impact the eating disorder has on the entire family unit.
- **Nutritional counselling** – Dieticians or nutritionists are often involved in the treatment of eating disorders. They can help your loved one design meal plans, set dietary goals, and achieve a healthy weight. Nutritional counselling may also involve education about basic nutrition and the health consequences of eating disorders.
- **Residential treatment** – Residential or hospital-based care may be required when there are severe physical or behavioural problems, such as a resistance to treatment, medical issues that require a doctor’s supervision, or continuing weight loss.

Hospitalization for an eating disorder may be necessary if your loved one is:

- Dangerously malnourished
- Severely depressed or suicidal
- Suffering from medical complications
- Getting worse despite treatment

Take Care of Yourself and Have Patience

Don’t become so preoccupied with your loved one’s eating disorder that you neglect your own needs. Make sure you have your own support, so you can provide it in turn. Whether that support comes from a trusted friend or your own therapy sessions, what matters is that you have an outlet to talk about your feelings and to emotionally recharge. It’s also important to schedule time into your day for de-stressing, relaxing, and doing things you enjoy.

Recovering from an eating disorder takes time. There are no quick fixes or miracle cures, so it’s important to have patience and compassion. Don’t put unnecessary pressure on your loved one by setting unrealistic goals or demanding progress on your own timetable. Provide hope and encouragement, praise each small step forward, and stay positive through struggles and setbacks.

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