

# Eating Disorders/ Disordered Eating

## Information for Families and Friends

There is help.  
There is hope.  
You are not alone.



## Eating Disorders / Disordered Eating

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*It may be traumatic to find out that a family member or friend has an eating disorder. You may feel overwhelmed and very alone. It is important to remember that there is help, there is hope and, there are many other families dealing with similar issues. Eating disorders are treatable illnesses and knowledge about effective treatment continues to grow. There are things that you can do to help your loved one, yourself and other family members get through this difficult time.*

# Contained in this booklet:

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## It is not your fault.

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Eating disorders can happen in any family. No one asks to get an eating disorder – no one is to blame. The factors that may contribute to eating disorders are varied and can include any number of the following:

- dieting for weight loss
- biological predisposition
- genetic predisposition (to depression, anxiety, addictions, eating disorders)
- traumatic life experiences
- difficulty adjusting to life transitions
- low self-esteem
- personality; perfectionist tendencies
- limited range of coping abilities
- pressure to meet societal standards for body size, weight, shape, or attractiveness
- pressure related to athleticism/performance
- weight bias
- many other reasons that may not be listed above

For further information on the symptoms and types of eating disorders or disordered eating, please see the General Information Guide available at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/mh/eatingdisorders/index.html>

## How family members often feel

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As is the case with many illnesses, when a family member is struggling with an eating disorder it has an effect on the entire family. There are a range of emotions and feelings commonly reported by family members, including:

- feelings of anger, which may be directed at the individual with the eating disorder or at themselves for not being able to fix the problem. At times, anger may also be directed toward health professionals for not helping the individual to recover faster.
- a deep concern for the person with the eating disorder. It is difficult to see a family member or friend engage in self-destructive behaviours, and not know how to help.
- feelings of guilt. Family may wonder what they have done to contribute to the problem. The guilt may be further accentuated by friends, neighbours, and even health care providers who may imply that parents must have done something wrong to bring on this eating disorder.
- fear of completely losing family members or friends, as the eating disorder takes over more and more of their life.
- feelings of mistrust and conflict, as the person with an eating disorder may have repeatedly covered up destructive behaviours.

## What can families do to help?

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There are a range of things families and friends can do keep themselves and their relationships as healthy as possible.

### Do:

- Maintain a normal relationship with your family member or friend, and avoid allowing it to become all about the eating disorder (ex: whether food has been eaten, or weight has been lost/gained).
- Understand that the person may not be committed to getting well and be fearful of giving up the control and rituals of the disorder.
- Give age-appropriate opportunities for choice or decision making in the routines of daily life wherever possible – and encourage the person to assume responsibility for decisions made.
- Encourage your family member to get an assessment from a practitioner experienced in eating disorders. In the case of a child or teen, insist on an assessment.
- Work with a professional to provide healthy and safe limits on a child or teen's physical activities if he or she is malnourished
- Realize there is no quick and easy solution.
- Collaborate with other caregivers.
- Seek out ways to provide family members with the support they need (ex: individual help for family members, family support groups).
- Examine your feelings and thoughts about disordered eating and explore your own relationship to food
- Make time for yourself, spouse, friends and other family members.
- Take time for self care: rest, freedom from worry and fun.

In order to help family functioning be as positive as possible and to minimize struggles over food and eating:

### Avoid:

- Weighing and measuring people and food. Instead use other ways to measure health. Refer to internal signals / mindful / intuitive questions.
- Coercing/bribing someone to eat, as this may be counterproductive. Use firmness and confidence, but not force. Consult a treatment team for advice.
- Spending an unusual amount of time accommodating individual food preferences or fears.
- Commenting when someone appears to be over eating
- Making approval or love a condition of the individual's appearance, health, weight, achievement or any other attribute.
- Making family celebrations all about food. Try to select activities and events that are not meal or food-focused.

- Commenting – positively or negatively – on appearance or weight, whether it is about others or self.
- Imposing rules except those which are necessary for individual or family safety and well-being.
- Dwelling on blame or feelings of guilt – you will need your energy to care for yourself and your family member or friend. Remember that, at any given moment, most people are doing the best that they can.

## Where can I find out more about eating disorders?

The following are some websites that provide information on body image, disordered eating and eating disorders:

- **National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC)**  
<http://www.nedic.ca/> or toll free at 1-866-633-4220
- **Eating Disorders Manitoba**  
<http://eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca/>

## Recommended reading for family and friends

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A short reading list suggested by Manitoba eating disorder practitioners is available here:

<http://eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca/resources/>

For a more comprehensive list of books see Parentbooks Book List on Eating Disorders:

[http://www.parentbooks.ca/Eating\\_Disorders\\_&\\_Body\\_Image.html](http://www.parentbooks.ca/Eating_Disorders_&_Body_Image.html)

For information on having a healthy relationship to food: [www.ellynsatter.com](http://www.ellynsatter.com)

## Is there support in Manitoba for families and friends?

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Yes. **The Provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery Program** offers support for family members and friends of those with an eating disorder:

- **Family & Friends Workshop** is offered 3 times per year
- **Family, Friend or Partner Phone consultations or Coaching sessions** are available to provide information on the referral process, available services, education about eating disorders and guidance on recommended strategies that may be helpful in supporting your loved one.

For more information contact:

[edprogram@womenshealthclinic.org](mailto:edprogram@womenshealthclinic.org) or

phone 204-947-2422 ext. 137

- **Health Sciences Centre Adolescent Eating Disorder Program's** support is provided for family members and families are integrated into treatment services for children and teens being treated at HSC. See more about these services at:  
<http://eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca/get-help/teen/>

## Publicly funded treatment services

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**For information on eating disorders treatment in hospital and community, see: [eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca](http://eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca), or contact:**

### Women's Health Clinic – Provincial Eating Disorder Prevention & Recovery Program

Phone: 204-947-2422, ext. 137 in Winnipeg

Phone: 866-947-1517, ext. 137 toll-free

Email: [edprogram@womenshealthclinic.org](mailto:edprogram@womenshealthclinic.org)

Website: [www.womenshealthclinic.org](http://www.womenshealthclinic.org)

Address: 419 Graham Avenue, Winnipeg, MB

### Health Sciences Centre – Adult Eating Disorders Service Program

Phone: 204-787-3482

Address: 771 Bannatyne Avenue, Winnipeg, MB

### Health Sciences Centre – Child & Adolescent Eating Disorders Service Program

Phone: 204-958-9660 Centralized Intake Service – Mental Health

Address: 771 Bannatyne Avenue, Winnipeg, MB

**For further information or educational resources, see:**

### Eating Disorders Manitoba

[www.eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca](http://www.eatingdisordersmanitoba.ca)

### Women's Health Clinic – Eating Disorder Resources

<http://womenshealthclinic.org/what-we-do/blog-with-left-sidebar/online-resources/>

### Mental Health Education Resource Centre (MHERC)

4 Fort Street – Suite 100


Winnipeg, MB R3C 1C4

Phone: (204) 953-2355

Toll Free: 1-866-997-9918

Email: [info@mherc.mb.ca](mailto:info@mherc.mb.ca)

Website: [www.mherc.mb.ca](http://www.mherc.mb.ca)



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