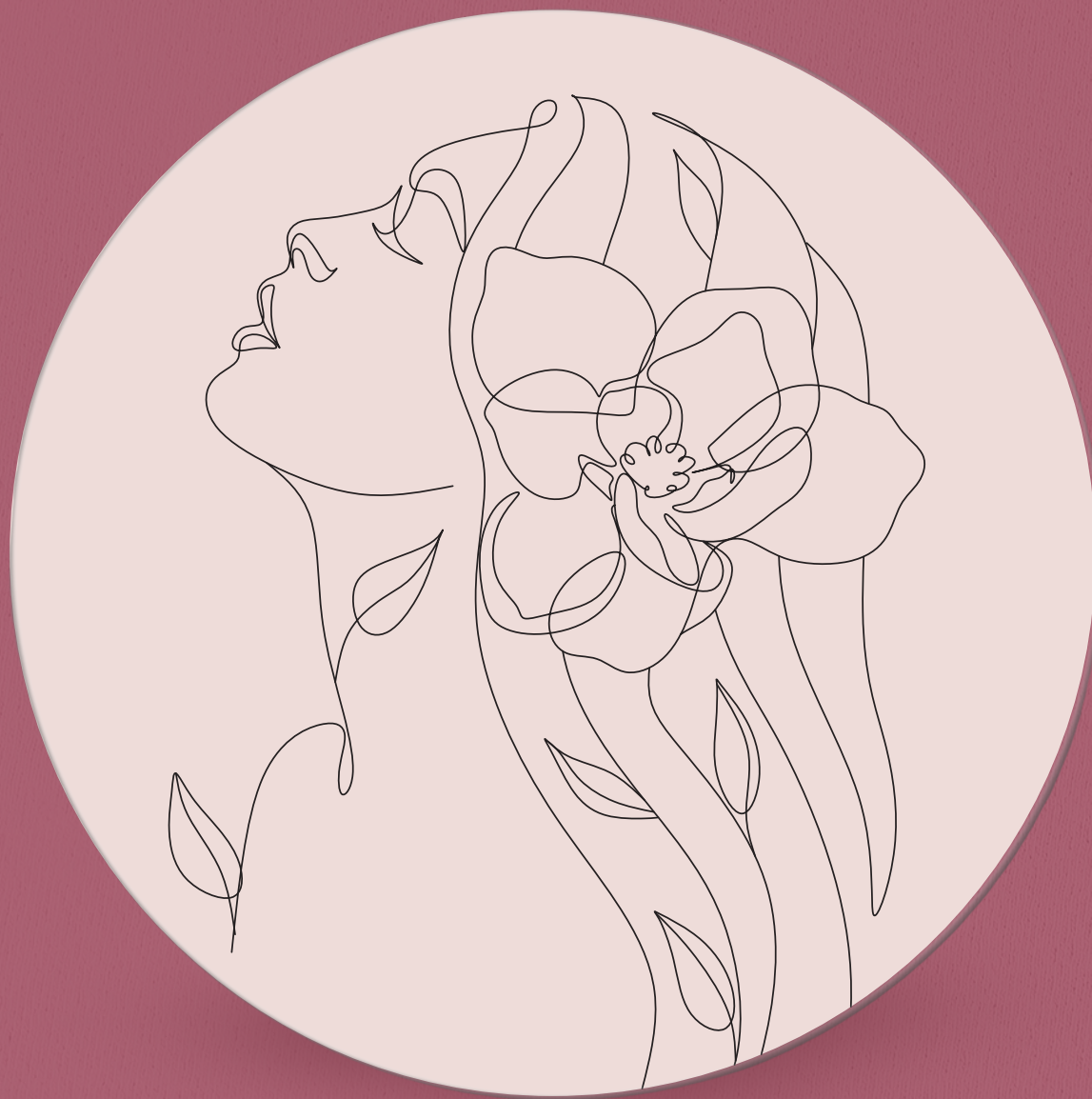


eating disorder
awareness
the inner experience



Recover Newport Beach
Healing • Community • Connection

It's not just about food

Eating disorders are more than what we eat.



What looks like a food issue is often rooted in deep emotional pain. People with Eating Disorders may use food to cope with anxiety, trauma, or low self-worth. It isn't about vanity — it's about survival.

Eating disorders are about more than food or weight. They are complex mental health conditions driven by pain, anxiety, and a need for control. The focus on calories or scales is only the surface.

Beneath that, people with eating disorders often wrestle with deep feelings of shame, fear, and self-criticism. This series (Part 1 of 2) will explore the internal, emotional experience of living with an eating disorder. (Whether you're worried about yourself or someone you care about, you are not alone.)



How common are Eating Disorders?

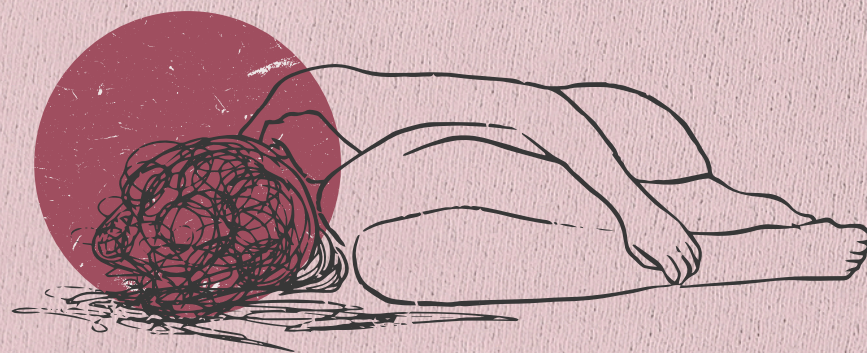
Nearly 1 in 10 people will struggle.



Over 28 million Americans will face an eating disorder in their lifetime. Many develop symptoms young, and many suffer silently. Eating Disorders can affect anyone — regardless of body size, age, gender, or race.

Eating disorders are more common than many realize. Nearly 1 in 10 Americans will struggle with an eating disorder (anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder, etc.) in their lifetime. That's roughly 28–30 million people – about the population of Texas.

These illnesses can begin at any age and affect people of all backgrounds. Alarming, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a spike in cases among teens and young adults, making awareness and early support more important than ever.



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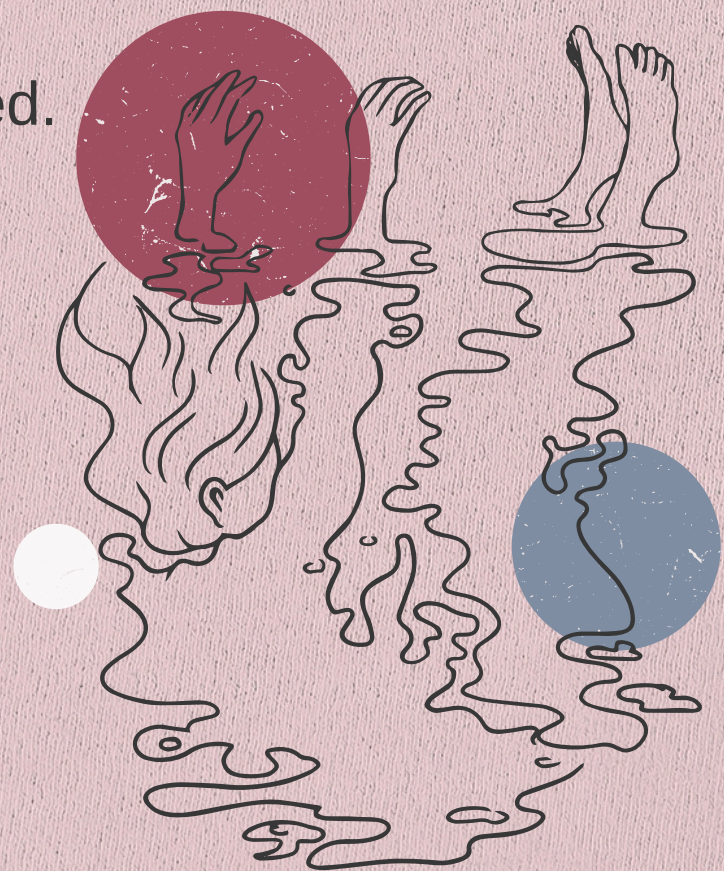
It can happen to anyone

EDs don't fit a single mold.



Eating disorders do not discriminate – they affect all genders, ages, and ethnicities. Boys and men struggle with eating disorders too (in Los Angeles, high school boys were found twice as likely to purge or use laxatives for weight control as the national average). Older adults can also be affected; about 13% of women over 50 report having eating disorder symptoms. Don't assume someone must be a teenage girl to have an eating disorder. It can happen to anyone, including people who don't fit the stereotypes.

Teen girls aren't the only ones affected. Eating Disorders impact men, older adults, athletes, professionals — anyone. Some don't even realize they're struggling until physical or emotional damage is already done.



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You can't tell by looking

“Healthy” appearance can hide suffering.



Less than 6% of people with Eating Disorders are underweight. Many look fine on the outside — but inside, they're in crisis. EDs thrive in silence, especially when society praises weight loss



Think you can spot an eating disorder just by appearance? Think again. Many people with eating disorders look “healthy” on the outside. In fact, fewer than 6% of people with eating disorders are medically underweight. Someone can be in a larger or average-size body and still be suffering from an eating disorder. Weight alone doesn't reveal the struggle.

These illnesses often remain hidden in plain sight, as those affected may smile and carry on publicly while secretly battling intense food-related anxiety or guilt.

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When it starts

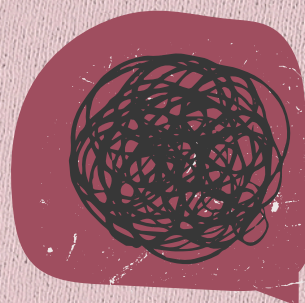
Many Eating Disorders begin in childhood or adolescence.



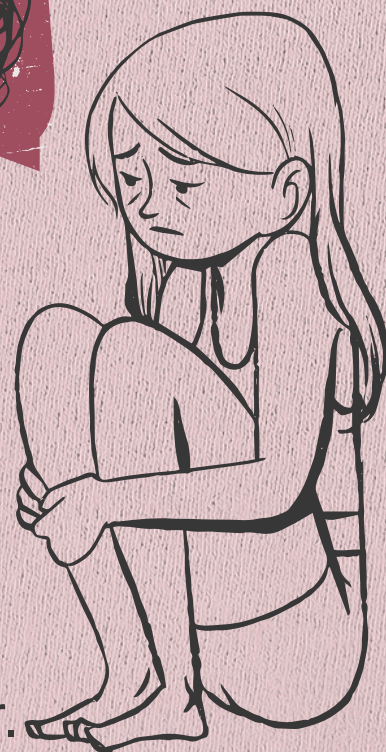
Some children worry about weight as early as age 6. Most eating disorders begin between ages 12–21. Social media, bullying, trauma, and dieting can all be triggers.

Eating disorders often start early – usually in the teen years, though they can emerge at any age. Many begin innocently: a diet, a fitness challenge, a desire to “**eat clean**,” that spirals into something dangerous.

The median age of onset is around 18 years old for anorexia and bulimia (and about 21 for binge eating). But concerns can take root even sooner – studies show some children start worrying about their weight or body shape as early as age 6.



What might start as “I just want to be healthier” can gradually turn into an all-consuming disorder.



Early signs

Small changes can signal something bigger.



Skipping meals. Food rituals. Intense guilt after eating. Social withdrawal. Constant body checking. If you or someone you love is showing these signs, it's worth paying attention.

What are some red flags to watch for? Here are a few early warning signs that someone might be developing an eating disorder:

- **Obsession with food or dieting:** Constantly counting calories, skipping meals, or cutting out entire food groups. They might make excuses to avoid eating with others.
- **Secretive behavior:** Developing strange food rituals (cutting food into tiny pieces, rearranging food) or hiding food. Withdrawing from friends and family, and becoming isolated about eating.
- **Body negativity:** An extreme preoccupation with body size, shape or the mirror – never feeling “good enough,” no matter what. Frequent negative comments about their own body (“I’m so fat,” “I hate how I look”).
- **Emotional changes:** Noticeable mood swings, increased anxiety around meals, or intense guilt and shame after eating. They may seem depressed or irritable, especially if their eating routine is disrupted.

(Someone with an eating disorder might not show all these signs, but even a few should raise concern. Early intervention is key.)

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The inner voice

EDs are powered by shame and fear.



“You’re not good enough.” “You’ll be worthy when you’re thin.”
This is the voice people with Eating Disorders hear every day.
Recovery means challenging these lies and reclaiming your
truth.

Inside, a person with an eating disorder is often fighting a cruel
inner voice that constantly judges and shames them. It might
say things like, “You’re not good enough unless you lose
weight,” or push impossible standards.



One young survivor described it as an
“all-consuming voice” in her head telling her
“If I lose all this weight, people will like me.”
That voice fed her feelings of unworthiness
and drove her to harmful behaviors. Fear,
anxiety, and guilt become constant
companions. The eating disorder often
serves as a twisted coping mechanism
– a way to feel in control amidst emotional
chaos or to numb painful feelings.

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Impact on daily life

Eating Disorders affect more than eating.



Relationships. Work. School. Sleep. Joy. Eating disorders don't just hurt your body — they drain your whole life. They isolate people, damage trust, and distort identity.

Living with an eating disorder can feel like your whole world is shrinking. It doesn't only hit your body — it hits every aspect of your life. It erodes your self-esteem and sense of safety.

It can strain or even break relationships; you might cancel social plans that involve food, push away friends or family, or lie to hide your behaviors.

School or work may suffer because it's hard to concentrate on anything besides food, weight, and anxiety. In truth, eating disorders impact a person's identity, relationships, and daily functioning.

Loved ones often feel helpless or hurt, not realizing that the person isn't choosing the disorder over them — the disorder is controlling the person.

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Am I sick enough?

You don't need to “prove” your pain.



Many people feel they aren't “sick enough” to get help. If disordered eating controls your thoughts, emotions, or daily routine — that's enough. You deserve support.

Many people with eating disorders don't realize how serious it is. It's common to think “I'm not sick enough to need help” or to live in denial about the problem. The eating disorder voice can be very convincing, telling someone everything is “under control” (even as their health worsens).

One California woman admitted that it wasn't until she was deep into treatment that she realized “not being hungry is not normal.” She had been so accustomed to starvation that it felt ordinary. This kind of denial can delay people from seeking help. If you find yourself rationalizing dangerous behavior — for example, believing that eating very little is “just discipline” — it might be the disorder talking. Recognizing there's a problem is the first step toward getting better.



Culture & comparison

The world we live in plays a role.



We are flooded with images that glorify thinness and control. Social media, trends, and filters create impossible expectations. We must unlearn what we've been taught about bodies.

Our culture can fuel eating disorders. We are bombarded with messages that thinner is better – from glossy magazine covers to the endless scroll of “perfect” bodies on social media.

Constant comparison and body shaming can trigger disordered eating in vulnerable people. For example: Katie, a teen from Sacramento with dreams of being a dancer, found herself always comparing her body to others on stage. By 16, she began heavily restricting her food and later purging after meals. It wasn't until much later that she heard body-positive messages. “I was well into my late teens before I heard people say things like ‘all bodies are good bodies.’ If someone had talked to me when I was 12, it might have helped nip things in the bud,” she reflected.

That insight shows why early education matters. In California, lawmakers are even proposing a bill to introduce body image and self-esteem programs in schools to help prevent eating disorders.

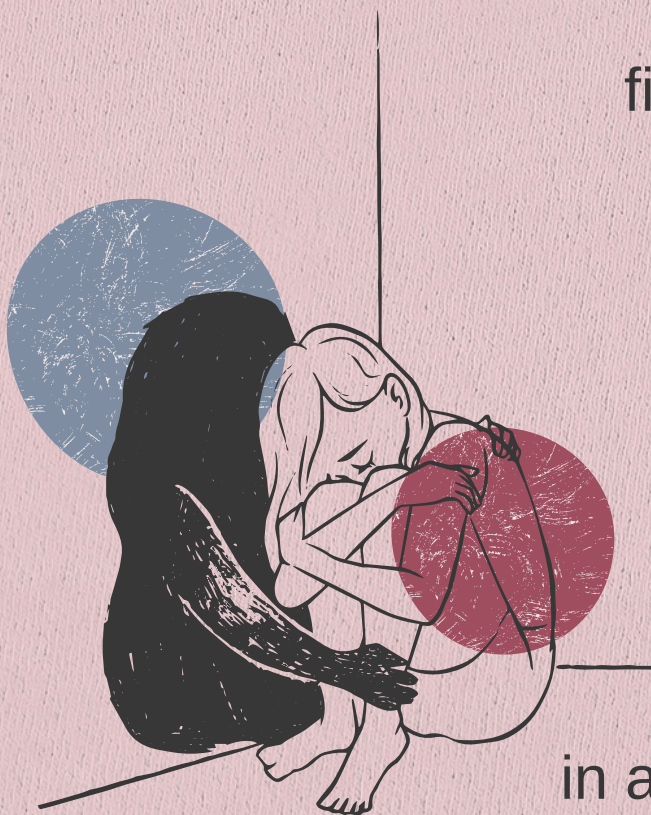
What to say (and not say)

Support with empathy, not judgment.



Avoid: "Just eat." "You don't look sick." Say: "I care." "You don't have to do this alone." The way we talk about Eating Disorders can either open a door or shut someone down.

Eating disorders are not a choice or a moral failing. If you are struggling, remember: it's not your fault. You didn't cause this by "lacking willpower" – in fact, people with eating disorders are often incredibly strong for coping as best they can. If you're a loved one, approach the person with empathy, not blame.



Comments like "Just eat and you'll be fine" or "You're doing this for attention" are unhelpful and hurtful. Instead, assure them that you care and that they deserve help. Eating disorders thrive on secrecy and shame, so breaking that shame with understanding is powerful. You are not alone, and there is no shame in asking for support or professional help.

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You are not alone

Recovery is possible.



Millions recover. It's not easy, but it is possible. If you're struggling or worried about someone else, help is available.

You are not broken. You are not alone.

You are worthy of healing.

Recovery is possible. Millions of people have overcome eating disorders and gone on to live healthy, fulfilling lives. The journey isn't always easy or quick – for many, it's a long process of learning balance and self-acceptance – but it can happen. Reaching out for help early can greatly improve the chances of recovery.

If anything in these slides felt familiar to you, consider talking to someone you trust or contacting a resource like the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA).

You deserve help and healing, no matter how “minor” you think your problem might be. Stay tuned for Part 2, where we'll delve into the medical and psychological consequences of eating disorders and why proper support is so crucial.

There is hope – and you are worth it.

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Stick Around for Part 2

The Learn about the medical and mental health impact.



In Part 2 of this series, we'll dive deeper into the physical and psychiatric complications of eating disorders.

Follow us and turn on post notifications so you don't miss it.

In the meantime, check out more insights and stories on our website or follow us on our other social platforms.

Your awareness can change a life.

