What You and Your Friends Should Know About Eating Disorders

Mental Health Counseling
ED’s are often symptoms of emotional conflict. For instance, emotional stress can trigger ED symptoms and the preoccupation with one’s body image and obsessions about food and eating. During the initial counseling session, the student will be asked questions regarding eating habits, behaviors, lifestyle, and emotions. The counselor will establish treatment goals with the student’s input and evaluate progress at follow-up appointments. The counselor will refer the student for medical and nutritional evaluation.

Medical Evaluation
All persons with a suspected eating disorder should be examined by a medical practitioner. The purpose of this evaluation is to confirm a diagnosis and to evaluate for medical complications that may result from starvation; laxative, diuretic, diet pill or ipecac misuse; or binge/purge cycle such as:

- Low body weight, low heart rate, and low body temperature
- Damage to esophagus, stomach, and/or tooth decay
- Abnormal bowel function
- Electrolyte imbalances, dangerous heart rhythms

The medical practitioner may recommend medications to treat underlying depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions. Many cases of ED’s can be treated on an outpatient basis. However, students who do not respond to treatment may be referred for hospitalization or residential care as needed.

You Can Help a Friend with an Eating Problem
Talk to a professional about your concerns. Learn about eating disorders and symptoms.
- Talk with your friend. Pick a time and place that is informal but private.
- Do not nag, blame, or admonish. Be supportive, but know your limits.
- Your friend may be resentful or angry, but do not take it personally.
- Encourage your friend to speak to a professional. Assist your friend in getting help.

Contact Professionals
Thagard Student Health Center
Medical Appointment 850-644-4567
Nutrition Appointment 850-644-8871
http://tshc.fsu.edu

University Counseling Center
(located in the Student Life Building, Suite 201)
Counseling Appointment 850-644-2003
http://counseling.fsu.edu
Check the statements below that apply to you:

- Eat regularly but restrict my total calories to 1200 per day
- Excessively count calories to make sure I’m not eating too much
- Think about food, weight, and/or my body size all the time
- Frequently skip meals to control my weight
- Frequently use laxatives, diuretics, and weight loss supplements to control my weight
- Become anxious prior to eating
- Feel guilty after eating a food I consider “bad”
- Eat the same thing day after day or meal after meal
- Feel dissatisfied with my body size
- Exercise for weight loss regardless of whether I am ill or tired
- Feel anxious if I am unable to exercise
- Frequently use muscle-gaining or fat-burning supplements

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of these statements, then you may be struggling with disordered eating or negative body image.

What Causes an Eating Disorder (ED)?

The development of an Eating Disorder (ED) is complex in nature and often stems from a variety of influences (peers, societal expectations, media, parents, trauma, mental health problems, etc). Individuals struggling with an ED often have negative body image, poor self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and/or obsessive compulsive problems. ED’s affect both men and women.

Common Types of Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa (AN)
Anorexia Nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by self-starvation, excessive weight loss, and refusal to maintain a weight which is normal for one’s height and age. These individuals often perceive themselves as being fat even though they are extremely thin.

Bulimia Nervosa (BN)
Bulimia Nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by a cycle of bingeing and compensatory behaviors. These behaviors are used to “compensate” or “undo” the effects of binge eating by ridding the body of food and calories such as self-induced vomiting, laxative and diuretic misuse, and excessive exercise.

Binge Eating Disorder (BED)
Binge Eating Disorder, also known as compulsive eating, is a type of eating disorder characterized by recurrent binge eating without the regular use of compensatory measures.

Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS)
An Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified is characterized by sporadic or chronic disordered eating patterns. In an effort to control one’s weight, individuals who struggle with EDNOS may, for example, struggle with binge eating, then restrict their eating and/or excessively exercise and then repeat this cycle. However, these patterns do not meet the clinical criteria for AN or BN.

What Treatment Options are Available for Students at Florida State?

Treatment Team Approach
Due to the complexity of ED’s, treatment requires a comprehensive team approach. To this end, Thagard Student Health Center and the University Counseling Center have collaborated to create the Eating Disorder Treatment Team (ED Team). The role of this multidisciplinary team of health professionals is to meet on a monthly basis and discuss the care plans of students struggling with ED’s. Each member discusses the student’s progress from their individual perspectives and receives professional support and suggestions from other members in order to optimize the students’ care.

The treatment team professionals include dietitians, medical personnel (primary care physicians, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurse practitioners) and mental health professionals (counselors, psychologists, art therapists, clinical social workers). Initial assessment and ongoing follow-up with medical, nutrional, and mental health personnel are all essential aspects in the treatment of an ED. The team is responsible for providing counseling and support for students who are open to receive help. In other words, we can’t force someone to be evaluated or to comply with a recommended treatment plan.

Nutrition Assessment and Follow-Up
The initial assessment can identify disordered eating patterns and distorted thinking about weight, eating, and food. The ultimate goals of nutrition care are to normalize eating behaviors, decrease disordered eating, stabilize weight, and help the student feel confident about making balanced food choices. The nutritionist will refer the student for medical and mental health counseling.