

The background of the entire page is a dynamic, swirling vortex. It features concentric, brush-stroke-like patterns in various shades of blue, from deep navy to light sky blue, and hints of purple. The center of the vortex is a bright, white-to-light-blue circular core, creating a strong sense of depth and movement, similar to a cyclone or a whirlpool.

Reads for Paeds

Eating Disorders: *An Illustrated Guide for Youth*

This book is meant only to support what a young person and their family have already been told about eating disorders by a healthcare professional. Do not use this book to replace advice and treatment from a doctor.

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About this book:

This book was primarily written for young people with eating disorders, or young people who may be wondering if they have an eating disorder. It does not need to be read all at once - if you don't have time to read the whole thing, or if reading takes a lot of concentration, you can just flip to the parts that interest you. The topics covered are shown on the next page.

There are many resources available for parents of teens with eating disorders, and for adults with eating disorders. There is a lot of information about eating disorders on the Internet, but not all of it is accurate. The information in this book is based on careful research and the advice of a doctor with expertise in eating disorders.

This book is meant to only be a supplement to professional advice from a health-care provider. If you are concerned you may have an eating disorder, talk to a parent or trusted adult, like a teacher or coach, and seek medical advice from your doctor.

TOPICS IN THIS BOOK

P. 6 - What is an eating disorder?

P. 9 - Who gets eating disorders?

P. 10 - What causes eating disorders?

P. 12 - What problems do eating disorders cause?

P. 14 - My parents and/or doctor think I have an eating disorder. They keep telling me that I have to eat more and gain weight. What if I think they're wrong?

P. 15 - Eating disorder myths

P. 16 - What are the steps to treat an eating disorder?

P. 18 - Why do we need to eat? What do our bodies use food for?

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is a serious and potentially life threatening illness. A person has an eating disorder when they try to control their weight or the amount of food they eat in an unhealthy way. The two main ways a person might do this are by eating much less than is healthy (restricting) or by making themselves throw up what they do eat (purging). Often people with eating disorders feel very unhappy with their weight and how they look, and hope that losing weight will make them feel better. There are several types of eating disorders; two are described below.

1) **Anorexia nervosa** is when a person restricts the amount they eat more than is healthy over a long period of time. The person loses more weight than is healthy or does not gain any weight even though they are growing in height. A person with anorexia nervosa may also exercise too much, and may make themselves throw up what they do eat (purging).

2) **Bulimia nervosa** is when a person eats a very large amount of food in a short period of time (binges) and then tries to get the food out of their body afterward. For example, they may throw up or take laxative medications after eating. In bulimia nervosa, the pattern of bingeing and purging occurs regularly - once a week or more.

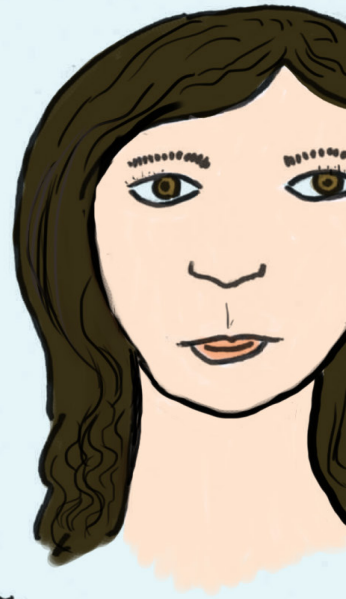
EXAMPLES OF ILLNESSES:

- pneumonia
- eating disorder
- ear infection
- cancer
- diabetes
- depression

...AND many more.

What is a **binge**?

In the setting of an eating disorder, a “binge” only means the person has eaten much more food than is normal in a short period of time, such as a day’s worth of food or even more. Though someone may feel guilty after eating a rich food such as a cookie, slice of pizza, or piece of cake with ice cream, this is not technically a binge.



Who gets eating disorders?

In the past, doctors, psychologists, and other people who treated individuals with eating disorders thought that it was mostly white, well-off, teenage and young adult girls who suffered from eating disorders.

In fact, research has shown that this is not the whole truth. At least 10% of all people with eating disorders are boys or men. Although many people with eating disorders fall sick for the first time when they are a teen, or a young adult, doctors and other health-care professionals now recognize that adults of all ages may also have eating disorders. And, it does not matter what a person's race or ethnic background is, or how rich or poor they are - eating disorders don't discriminate!



What causes eating disorders?

Many ideas and theories have been proposed to explain the cause of eating disorders. However, no one idea has been shown to be true above all the rest. Many researchers think that eating disorders have both “genetic” and “environmental” causes. “Genetics” represents what has been passed down to you from your parents, whereas “environment” represents everything else - your relationships with friends and family, the community in which you grew up, the activities you do, and the things you have or do not have.

People with eating disorders often are more likely to develop this illness due to the genes they have from their parents, their personality traits (such as being anxious or perfectionistic), and other factors like having low self-esteem. Then, something happens that “triggers” the eating disorder to begin. This “trigger” could be almost anything.

Examples of things that could trigger an eating disorder in a susceptible person:

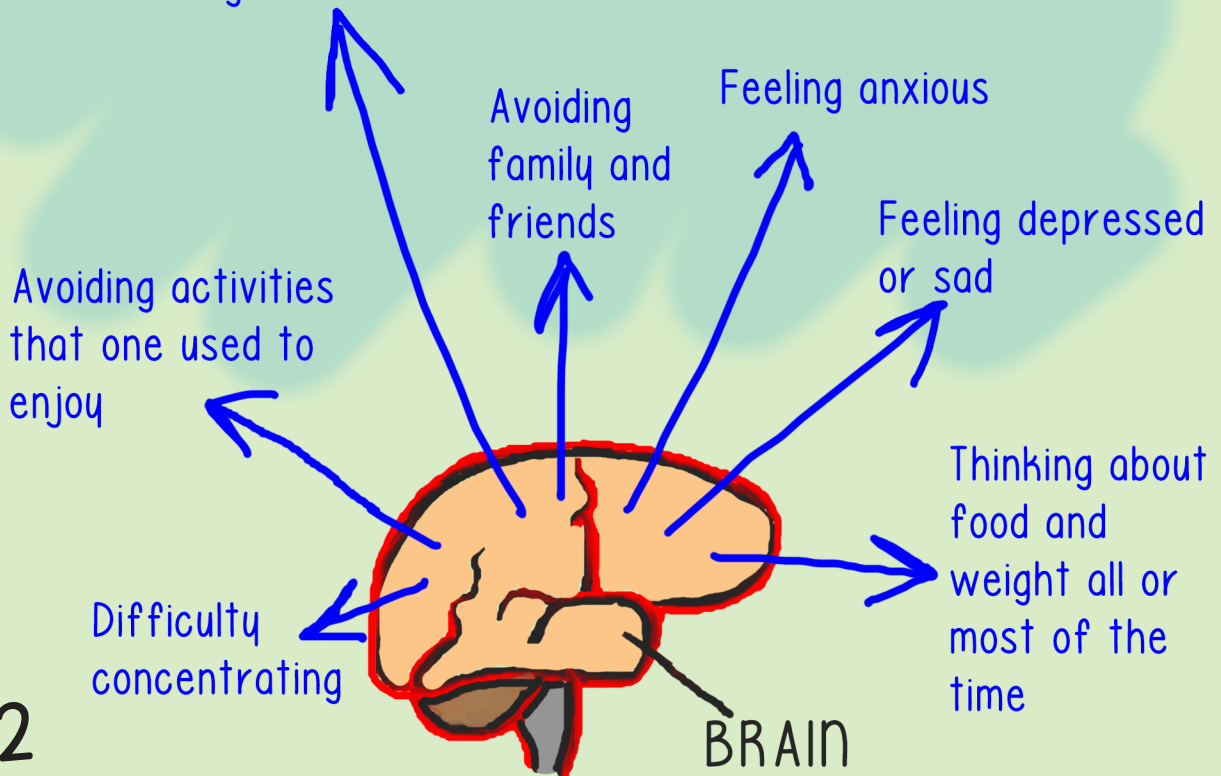
- Mean comments from someone at school; bullying
- Participating in a sport where the athletes are told or pressured to keep their weight low
- Feeling uncomfortable with the bodily changes that happen during puberty
- Being surrounded by materials that tell you it is very important to be thin, like fashion magazines or pro-eating disorder websites
- Very stressful life situations, such as trauma or abuse

It may not be possible to trace all the causes of an individual's eating disorder. But despite not knowing all of the reasons for eating disorders, recovery is still very much possible.

What problems do eating disorders cause?

Eating disorders can cause a long number of problems, both psychological (affecting how you think and feel) and physical (affecting the health of your body). A scary fact is that of all mental illnesses, anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate: this means that out of all mental illnesses, anorexia causes the most deaths. The complications of bulimia nervosa can also be life-threatening. This shows that eating disorders are very serious illnesses. Some of the psychological problems caused by eating disorders are:

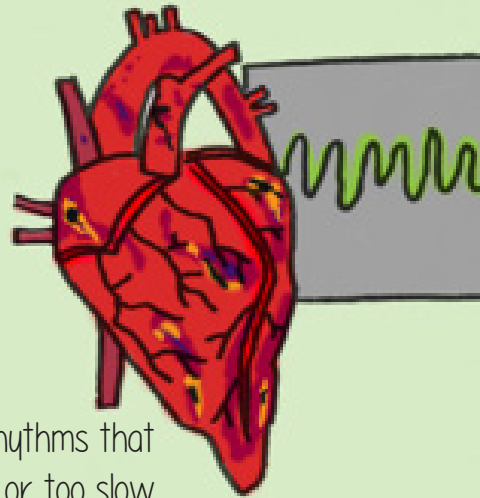
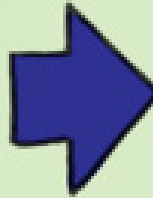
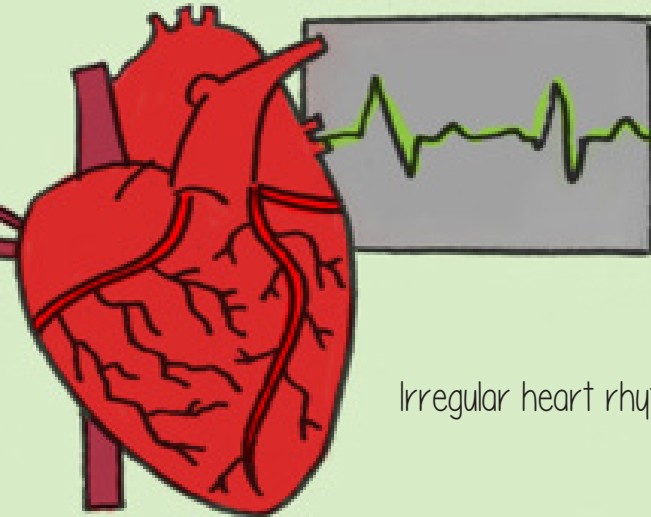
Denial: thinking everything is fine; being unable to recognize that one is sick



Physical problems caused by eating disorders:



Poor dental health



Irregular heart rhythm, or heart rhythms that are too fast or too slow

- Electrolyte imbalances (unhealthy levels of chemicals in the blood)
- Often feeling cold
- Feeling excessively tired
- Not being able to fall asleep
- Bruising easily
- Feeling faint and/or fainting
- Dehydration
- Dry skin
- Swollen cheeks

My parents and/or my doctor think I have an eating disorder. They keep telling me that I have to eat more and gain weight. What if I think they're wrong?

An unfortunate fact about eating disorders is that they can cause denial. In fact, the symptom of denial (thinking everything is fine), when connected to other eating disorder problems, is part of what helps doctors and health care providers recognize that a person is suffering from an eating disorder! Many, many people with eating disorders think that what they are experiencing is "not that bad" and that they "can stop any time they want." Sadly, many of these people find that stopping eating disorder patterns is often a long and difficult fight that takes quite a lot of time and effort.

When doctors diagnose someone with an eating disorder, they use many tools to help them make sure that they are picking up on the right problem, like specialized manuals with certain rules about who fits the diagnosis, growth charts, blood tests, tests of heart function, talking to the person who is thought to have an eating disorder and their parents, physical examinations, and more. Remember, it helps nobody to tell a person who really doesn't have an eating disorder, and is very much fine, that they are sick with an eating disorder! If your parents and medical professionals think that you are sick with an eating disorder and want you to eat more and gain weight, it is because they are concerned for your health and happiness.

EATING DISORDER MYTHS:

Myth #1 - Eating disorders only happen because of the media

- Many people think promotion of thinness, dieting, and weight loss in our culture play a role in creating eating disorders. Although the high value placed on thinness and dieting in our society certainly can make even healthy people feel they need to lose weight, it is important to know that eating disorders have occurred in different periods of history and in many cultures across the world, including those that do not value being very thin.

Myth #2 - If someone has an eating disorder, it's their family's fault

- Families used to be blamed for causing eating disorders. We now know that this is false. Many people with eating disorders have loving and supportive families, and families often play a key role in helping a young person recover from an eating disorder. Families can help by setting goals about healthy eating together, having meals together, and making sure a young person is not participating in eating disorder behaviours like purging or over-exercising.

What are the steps to treat an eating disorder?

The first part of treatment is making sure that the person suffering is out of physical danger. Depending on how severe the eating disorder is, this might mean spending some time in a hospital under close watch, receiving medicines, or seeing a doctor on a regular basis for check-ups. Treatment for an eating disorder often involves a team of professionals, including a doctor, a therapist, and a dietician or nutritionist who is an expert at recommending how much a person should eat and exercise in order to regain health. You and your parents will work together with this team to improve your health. Together with this first part of treatment comes relearning how to eat and exercise in a healthy way, and gaining a healthy amount of weight if needed. Learning how to do this is not an easy process, but it can be done.

The final part is rebuilding a full life and finding enjoyment in life. A person with an eating disorder often has difficulty focusing on anything other than food and weight. Part of what makes recovery from an eating disorder worthwhile is remembering other parts of life that provide satisfaction, enjoyment, and purpose - like having the energy to read books, score goals in sports, play an instrument, spend time and laugh with friends, go to school and do well in a favourite subject, think about the future - and much more! This part of recovery will likely not be accomplished all at once, but instead one step at a time. At this stage, therapy sessions can help people with eating disorders get back to the important and fun aspects of life.

TREATMENT PLAN

Part 1: Get the patient out of immediate **danger**

Where? In the hospital or through visits to the doctor, depending on how severe the illness is.

What? Monitoring blood chemicals, giving medicines if needed, eating. Here, FOOD IS THE MEDICINE.

Who? The patient, their family, their doctor, therapists, nutritionist/dietician.

Part 2: Help the patient regain a healthy body

Where? In the hospital or at the doctor's office/at home.

What? Learning how to eat and exercise in a healthy way, gaining weight if necessary. Again, FOOD IS MEDICINE.

Who? The patient, their family, their doctor, therapists, nutritionist/dietician.

Part 3: Get back to enjoying life

Where? Going to therapy programs and doing activities that were previously fulfilling.

What? Learning how to cope with life's problems without going back to eating disorder patterns, recognizing what thoughts and actions are driven by the eating disorder, and learning how to become a separate person from the illness.

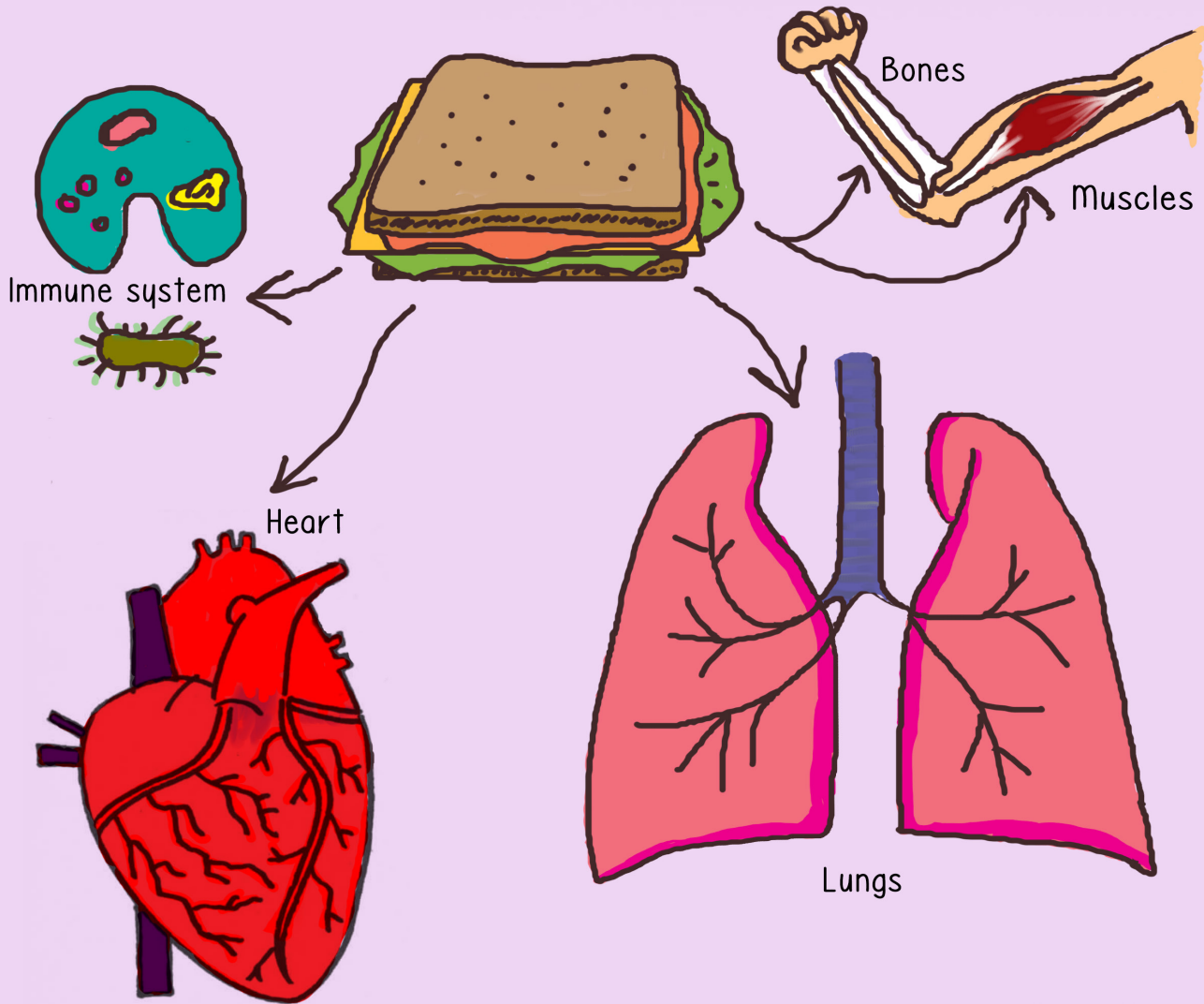
Who? The patient, their family, their doctor, therapists, nutritionist/dietician.

Why do we need to eat?

What do our bodies use food for?

Food is a source of energy. In fact, a “calorie” is simply a unit of energy. The energy in food helps your body do the tasks that keep you alive, growing, and able to participate in activities that you enjoy. For example, your brain uses at least 20% of this energy to keep you thinking, speaking, breathing, and moving! Some other parts of our bodies that rely on energy from food are:

- The heart, which needs energy to keep beating
- The lungs, which need energy to keep breathing
- The muscles in your body which need energy to help you move
- Your digestive system, which needs energy to keep food moving through it, preventing issues like constipation
- Your metabolism, which produces energy to keep the body warm
- Your kidneys and liver, which use energy to break down toxins and clear waste products from the body
- Your immune system, which needs energy to fight off infections
- Your bones, which need energy to stay strong and keep growing



If you are in your teenage years or younger, you are likely still growing. Growing in height requires a lot of energy, and if the body is missing out on nutrition it can stop growing early, leaving you shorter than you would otherwise be. When a person grows in height, it is normal and expected that their weight will also increase. If you have an eating disorder as a child or as a teenager, a very important goal is to eat the amount of food that will help your body reach its expected height. If you have an eating disorder treatment team, they can help you and your parents to get your growth back on track!

Helpful resources

If you have any questions about what you've read in this book, feel free to bring it up with a trusted adult or a health-care professional.

You can also check out the resources below for more information on eating disorders.

The National Eating Disorders Information Centre - Canadian non-profit providing resources on eating disorders and weight preoccupation.

<http://www.nedic.ca/>

National Eating Disorders Association - American non-profit advocating on behalf of and supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders.

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

Eating Disorders Foundation of Canada - Canadian non-profit that raises funds to establish residential treatment, transition housing and to support ongoing research and treatment programs for eating disorders.

<http://www.edfocanada.com/index.html>



We would love to hear from you!
Please give us your feedback at:
www.readsforpaeds.com

Eating Disorders

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The QMed Reads for Paeds project was started by the Queen's Medicine Class of 2017. Our goal is to write and illustrate engaging books to explain illnesses that affect children. The books are gifts from us to patients, with the hope of empowering them and their families.

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