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Know! Take a Bite Out of Eating Disorders

February 21 – 27 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, an annual campaign to bring attention to the critical needs of people with eating disorders.

Among the many pressures teens face in their young lives, there is the pressure to look fit and trim. Going through adolescence is difficult enough with all the changes the body and brain are experiencing. Throw in there the pressure to look a certain way during all that growing and developing, and it is no wonder why an approximate half million teens severely struggle with weight and body image issues.

Most teens are at least somewhat self-conscious about their appearance, but it is when a child becomes obsessed with body image, weight loss, dieting and control of food that an eating disorder may be developing.

There are many types of eating disorders including anorexia (self-starvation), bulimia (binging and purging), and binge eating (eating large amounts of food without behaviors to prevent weight gain).

The first step towards prevention is education. Take a look at the following Myths vs. Facts:

I'm glad I don't have to deal with this yet; my child is only in elementary.

While the average age of onset for eating disorders is 12 to 13-years old, specialists report diagnosing children as young as five or six with the illness.

I have all boys, so thankfully, I don't have to worry about eating disorders.

Males actually make up about one-third of those with eating disorders, though they are more likely to focus on building muscle, more likely to purge via exercise, and they are at greater risk for steroid use.

I would know if my child had an eating disorder. Plus, my child would not make such a bad choice.

Experts say eating disorders can hide in plain sight and may easily go undetected and undiagnosed until the person's health is at significant risk. Most people do not choose this for themselves. Eating disorders are complex mental illnesses caused by both genetic and environmental

factors (including physical illnesses, childhood teasing and bullying, and other life stressors).

No way! My child's an athlete with a fantastic future.

Athletes may be at greater risk for developing eating disorders, particularly, gymnasts, runners, wrestlers, rowers, dancers, swimmers or those who play any other sport or activity that may involve weight restrictions, and where weight loss may unintentionally be reinforced or rewarded.

C'mon, is it really that big of a deal?

In addition to a long list of serious health consequences, decreased cognitive ability and productivity in school and strained relationships with family and friends, eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness. Up to 20% of people with chronic anorexia, bulimia and eating disorder not otherwise specified, will die as a result of their illness. Yes - it really is that big of a deal!

According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), individuals with eating disorders may also be at increased risk for co-occurring conditions such as mood and anxiety disorders, substance abuse (alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, etc.), self-harm (cutting, etc.) and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

NEDA offers free educational toolkits and other great resources for parents, educators, coaches and trainers, for the early detection and intervention of eating disorders. **Click here** to learn more.

Sources: [National Eating Disorders Association \(NEDA\)](#). [Bridget Engel, Psy.D., Natalie Staats Reiss, Ph.D., and Mark Dombeck, Ph.D: Mental Help: Prevalence, Onset And Course Of Eating Disorders.](#)

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