

Help When You Are Stuck In Disordered Eating

Disordered eating is a coping strategy for dealing with life challenges, stressors, or relationship-distress. While in the beginning, disordered eating can give us the illusion that we are more in control, over time it can take over our lives, impair academic performance, increase social isolation and shame, and ultimately be detrimental -- even dangerous -- to our health.

With a supportive team, healing is possible. For those who try to recover on their own from disordered eating patterns, the behaviors typically become more entrenched, creating further frustration and self-blame. We encourage students to break through the mindset that keeps them isolated and find the courage to make the first call to a professional knowledgeable about eating disorders.

The Counseling Center, Student Health Center, and the Campus Dietician collaborate together as multidisciplinary Eating Disorder Resource Team to support students who have disordered eating behaviors. If a provider who is concerned about a student's eating behaviors impacting their physical or emotional well-being, we follow best practice recommendations by encouraging the student to have a consultation with a therapist, a dietitian, and a physician.

We recommend students schedule an "Eating Disorder Consultation" at each of the following campus services who serve on the team.

Counseling Center	360-650-3164
Student Health Center	360-650-3400
Campus Dietician	360-650-6254

At Western, this team meets twice per month in order to coordinate care and identify the most appropriate treatment recommendations for each student's unique needs. The team understands that eating disorder treatment may require a higher level of care than can be provided through the Western, and is dedicated to connecting students to appropriate community referrals.

Some students can be served using campus resources, such as the Counseling Center, the Campus Dietician and the Health Center. Others may need more intensive or longer term treatment off-campus with practitioners in the local community, in an intensive outpatient eating disorder program, residential treatment or in severe cases inpatient hospitalization.

Off-Campus Resources

Call the Counseling Center to ask for referrals to professionals who specialize in the treatment of the Bellingham community.

Tips for Talking To A Friend

If you are worried about your friend's eating behaviors or attitudes, express your concerns in a loving and supportive way. Discuss your worries early on instead of waiting until your friend has

endured the damaging physical and emotional effects of eating disorders. In a private and relaxed setting, talk to your friend in a calm and caring way about the specific things you have seen or felt that have caused you to worry.

Set a time to talk

Set aside a time for a private, respectful meeting with your friend to discuss your concerns openly and honestly. Timing is important: find a time and place away from other distractions.

Communicate your concerns

Share your memories of specific times when you felt concerned about your friend's eating, exercise, or purging behaviors.

Ask your friend to explore these concerns

Ask your friend to explore these concerns with a counselor, doctor, or nutritionist who is knowledgeable about eating issues. If you feel comfortable doing so, offer to help your friend make an appointment or accompany your friend on their first visit.

Avoid conflicts or a battle

Avoid conflicts or a battle of the wills with your friend. Chances are good that your friend will deny or minimize any problems. People who are struggling with eating disorders often feel intense shame about their behaviors, especially bingeing or purging. Common reasons for minimizing or denying their struggles include:

Not wanting to burden anyone

Wanting to solve their problems on their own without anyone's help;

Fearing losing the control they feel that eating disorders provide.

If your friend refuses to acknowledge their struggles, or denies that there is any reason for you to be concerned, restate your feelings of concern and caring and leave yourself open and available as a supportive listener. It may take the 57th attempt or the 109th person to express their caring for someone to be ready to seek help.

Avoid placing shame, blame, or guilt

Avoid placing shame, blame, or guilt on your friend regarding their actions or attitudes. Do not use accusatory "you" statements like, "You just need to eat." Or, "You are acting irresponsibly." Instead, use "I" statements. For example: "I'm concerned about you because I see you skipping meals." Or, "I feel afraid for you when I hear you vomiting." Also acknowledge that we are all impacted by the cultural messages to look a certain way. Share a story about your own struggles to accept your body.

Avoid giving simple solutions.

For example, "If you'd just stop, then everything would be fine!" Or, "It's not healthy for you to only eat salad."

Express your continued support.

Remind your friend that you care and want your friend to be healthy and happy.

If you are still concerned with your friend's health and safety after talking with your friend, call the Counseling Center. We are here to help.