

Eating Issues and Finding Help

Why the term 'eating difficulties'?

EDEN uses the term eating difficulties to refer to a wide range of women's and men's body and eating experiences and practices. This includes the clinically defined eating disorders anorexia and bulimia as well as issues such as eating past fullness, excessive exercising, restricting, purging, body dissatisfaction and yo-yo dieting.

EDEN believes it is useful to view all eating and body image issues as a reflection of the anxiety which food and body size hold for many people in societies where being thin/toned is idealised and being fat is abhorred. The severity or extent of these problems can be influenced by gendered expectations, family experiences, a background of abuse, major life stressors, unrealistic pressures to achieve, developmental or life-stage challenges (e.g., puberty, pregnancy, menopause) and disruption to normal eating patterns.

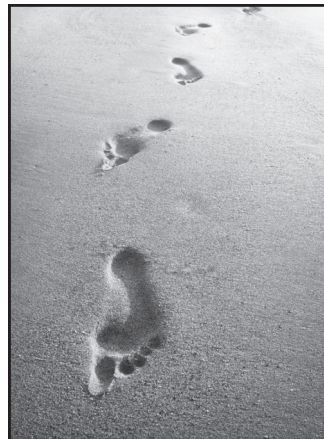
If you or someone you care about is struggling with any kind of eating or body image difficulty and you don't know what to do, you are welcome to contact us.



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How to recognise an eating issue

With an eating or body image issue you may:



- ◆ Feel out of control around food
- ◆ Feel nervous and guilty about eating
- ◆ Find yourself continually on a diet
- ◆ Find yourself constantly thinking about eating or not eating
- ◆ Eat according to a set of rules that you have created and not according to when you feel hungry
- ◆ Attempt to get rid of food by vomiting or taking laxatives
- ◆ Starve yourself for periods of time
- ◆ Use weight loss medications and supplements inappropriately
- ◆ Exercise excessively
- ◆ Feel compelled to exercise even if you are tired, unwell, injured
- ◆ Worry about bulking up or not bulking up
- ◆ Binge on food followed by feelings of anxiety, guilt or self-disgust
- ◆ Not be able to eat until you have exercised
- ◆ Use performance enhancing or bulking-up drugs, weight loss medications and supplements inappropriately
- ◆ Feel that your body is never quite 'right'
- ◆ Feel terrified of gaining or losing weight
- ◆ Believe that everything would be alright if only you had the 'ideal' body/physique

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Is it time for me to get help?

Consider your responses to these questions:

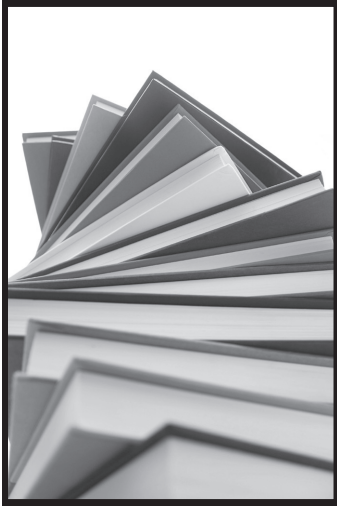
- ❖ Is this a problem for me a lot of the time?
- ❖ What changes have I noticed lately?
- ❖ Does this stop me from doing the things I would otherwise do?
- ❖ Does it cause me to feel bad about myself or put myself down?
- ❖ Do I feel unable to talk to anyone about this?
- ❖ Do I feel ashamed of this?
- ❖ Does this isolate me from other people?
- ❖ Does it diminish my quality of life?

If the answer is “yes” to one or more of these questions it may be time to seek help.



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Services and **Resources at EDEN**

- Individual counselling services
- Resource centre and library
- Training and Workshops
- Support groups
- Referral services
- Services for schools
- Newsletter
- Community events
- Community education
- Advocacy

Frequently Asked Questions



1) What Causes Eating and Body Image Issues?

A pervasive feature of westernized societies is the ideal of extreme thinness for women and toned muscularity for men. The pressure to achieve these ideals can cause people to focus on their body size and shape as a source of identity and self esteem. This engages many in a struggle with food, unhealthy weight management practices, a distorted body image, fears about their health and depression. A history of restricted eating and expectations/pressures of sport are common factors in the development of eating difficulties, and have become an accepted part of 'normal' behaviour. However there is no single factor responsible for a person developing an eating difficulty and indeed there is much debate about their origins and nature. However, we do know that dieting often precipitates the development of eating issues along with other factors such as: social pressure to be thin or toned, low self esteem, unrealistically high expectations of self, stress, major life changes and experiences of abuse. Eating difficulties can feel like a solution and means of coping with emotional issues, stress and anxiety.

2) Is it Possible to Recover From an Eating Issue?

Yes. Working through the issues that underlie eating difficulties can lead to acceptance and celebration of ourselves and a nourishing relationship with food. It is important to remember that recovering from an eating issue is not just a return to normal weight and is not necessarily a linear or straightforward process. Just as eating issues develop for a whole range of reasons, pathways to healing and wellbeing are similarly diverse. It is critical to find support that feels right for you. Many people find it helpful to work towards developing body trust. This includes eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full.



3) What is Body Mass Index (BMI)?

BMI is just a number. It is not an indication of health. Rather, it is a crude calculation of an individual's weight to height ratio that does not take into account important factors such as age, gendered fat distribution, ethnicity, socio-economic status, dieting history, access to medical care, experiences of discrimination, genetics, smoking history, disease status, and fitness level. BMI figures are used to label underweight, overweight and obesity and to reinforce ideas and prescriptions about dieting and weight management (which overlap with existing negative Western cultural values about fat).

4) What is a Healthy Weight?

‘Healthy weight’ is not a very useful term because health is not determined by weight. Health is a holistic concept determined by numerous factors including mental, emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing. In terms of the latter, eating a wide variety of foods and living actively contribute to good health but are not its sole determinants. EDEN considers a healthy weight to be the weight that a person naturally settles at when they are eating a range of nutritious and delicious foods and exercising in enjoyable and sustainable ways (without focusing on weight control). It is also really important to find ways to appreciate and accept our bodies and the natural diversity of body sizes in general. If you live in this way, you may or may not achieve an ‘ideal’ weight but you will be at the weight that is right for you and you will most definitely improve your health and feel better about yourself.



5) Is it ok to Comment on People’s Weight?

Commenting about weight and size and evaluating others’ appearance is inappropriate in any context. Conversations that focus on appearance (our own, others, or those in the media) leave an impression on the people around us. Even comments that we assume to be complimentary reinforce and reproduce restrictive body ideals and can produce self-consciousness (e.g., “You look great, have you lost weight?”, “You’re looking really cut, have you been working out?”, “That outfit is really slimming on you!”, or “You look better, have you gained a few pounds lately?”).

Support for Individuals

There are several options for supporting and resourcing yourself as you face an eating or body image issue. These include (but are not restricted to) attending support groups, seeing a counsellor, reading helpful literature, becoming active in your community around issues of size and weight, doing activities that you love, having supportive conversations, reaching out to others and reducing your sense of isolation.



Many individuals find it difficult to tell somebody what they are going through.

If this is you:

- ★ Consider who you have a trusting and respectful relationship with
- ★ Make a time to meet with that person in a safe place to discuss your concerns
- ★ Explain the feelings and behaviours that have become a part of your life
- ★ Ask the person if they would be willing to support you in seeking help

Many people find counselling helpful for addressing their eating issues. An important part of counselling for body image and eating difficulties from an EDEN perspective includes developing body trust.

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The ways EDEN would look at developing body trust would be to:

- investigate the origins and nature of eating issues and body image dissatisfaction
- look at the role of hunger in our lives and our abilities to meet our many hungers (emotional, spiritual, psychological, physical)
- reflect on our current relationship with food and body image
- find ways to learn to eat in response to hunger and to stop eating when we are full
- find ways to free ourselves from our food and body difficulties
- find ways to celebrate ourselves as we are now
- Consider, reflect and draw upon our resources, strengths and competencies



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What about Counselling?

EDEN considers the following to be important within a counselling relationship:

- ★ non-pathologising approaches to the whole range of eating and body image difficulties.
- ★ holistic definitions of health and wellbeing that are not related to size, weight and shape.
- ★ locating eating and body image difficulties within the socio-cultural context within which they arise.
- ★ clients feeling validated in their counselling relationships. We consider that your own knowledge and understandings around your eating and body image issues and experiences should be central to the counselling process.

EDEN offers eating-difficulties-specific counselling and support for those living with an eating difficulty/disordered eating and their loved ones. If you would like to talk to us about our counselling service, please do not hesitate to call us on (09) 378 9039 x2, email us at: info@eden.org.nz or check out our website at: www.eden.org.nz.

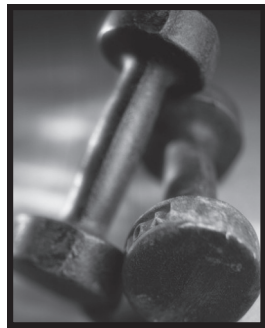


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Men & Eating Difficulties

Although generally invisible in historic accounts of eating difficulties, men are very much influenced by social pressures regarding body image and the ideal physique. Recently this has taken the shape of toned muscularity, with many men devoting large amounts of time to working out in the gym and adjusting their eating to look ‘cut’.



Idealized muscular definition is also perpetuated through the media, particularly in men’s magazines, with models appearing almost as if they have been carved out of stone. These images of men are artificially created using airbrushing and photo-editing—they are not real. Yet these bodies are treated as ‘ideal’ - and nobody talks about how altered these images really are.

For many men, eating difficulties can start as a ‘health kick’ and spending more time at the gym, but can easily lead to more serious problems. Excessive exercise and the use of performance enhancing or bulking-up drugs, weight loss medications and supplements add to the risk of developing eating difficulties.

Men who are involved in sports that require them to fit into weight categories, such as: rugby, martial arts, body building and boxing, are at significant risk for developing eating difficulties. Sports that include a high power to weight ratio such as: athletics, cross country, running, gymnastics and diving also put pressure on male athletes to obtain a particular body shape and size.

If you have found yourself being influenced significantly by these sport-related and social ideals about body image, please contact us.

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Before you start your next diet, consider this...

- ◆ **Diets don't work.** Even if you lose weight, you will probably gain it back, often regaining more than you lost (yo-yo dieting and weight cycling).
- ◆ **Diets can make you afraid of food.** Food can be nourishing, comforting, pleasurable and celebratory. Dieting can make food seem like the enemy and can deprive you of all the positive things about food.
- ◆ **Dieting interrupts our relationships with our bodies and appetites** so that we are no longer in touch with when we are hungry and when we are full.
- ◆ **Dieting disrupts normal eating patterns** and is a significant risk factor for eating disorders, binge eating and eating past fullness.
- ◆ **Dieting stunts the growth and development of young people,** mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.



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- ◆ **Diets don't improve your health.** Rather, they are psychologically taxing, and can contribute to disease and mortality.
- ◆ **Diets are expensive and ineffective.** They make promises they cannot keep e.g. “Life will be perfect if I am a size 10” or “Everything will work out if I have a six-pack”.
- ◆ **Diets are boring.** People on diets often talk and think about food and practically nothing else.
- ◆ **Diets can rob you of energy and cause fatigue and lightheadedness.** If you want to lead a full and active life, eat according to your body's needs.
- ◆ **Dieting increases size prejudice,** and makes people more judgmental and critical of themselves and others.
- ◆ **Dieting diminishes women and men,** subverting their dreams and ambitions, keeping them playing the anticipation game. There is a lot more to life than this.
- ◆ **Giving up dieting and learning to love & accept yourself just as you are will give you self-confidence, better health, and a more enduring sense of well-being.**



Recommended Reading



Anderson, A, Cohn, L. & Holbrook, T. (2000) *Making Weight: Men's conflicts with Food, Weight, Shape and Appearance* USA: Gurze Books.

Bliss, K. (2002) *Don't Weight: Eat Healthy and Get Moving Now!* Haverford: Infinity Publishing

Campos, P. (2004) *The Obesity Myth: Why our Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to our Health* England: Viking

Erdman, C.K. (1995) *Nothing to Lose: A Guide to Sane living in a Larger Body*. San Francisco: HarperCollins

Kausman, R. (2004) *If not dieting, then what?* Australia: Allen & Urwin.

Maisel, R., Epston, D. & Borden, A. (2004) *Biting the hand that starves you*. New York: W.W.Norton.

Malsen, H. & Burns, M. (2009) *Critical Feminist Approaches to Eting Dis/orders*. Routledge: London & New York

Pope, H.G, Phillips, K.A. & Olivardia, R. (2000) *The Adonis Complex: How to Identify, Treat, and Prevent Body Obsession in Men and Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Matz, J. & Frankel, E. (2006) *The Diet Survivors Handbook: 60 Lessons in Eating, Acceptance and Self-care* Illinois: Sourcebooks Inc.

McMillan, K. (2006) *Feast or Famine: A New Zealand Guide to Understanding Eating Disorders*. New Zealand: Random House.

Orbach, S. (2002) *Susie Orbach on eating: change your eating, change your life* England: Penguin Books

Scheaffer, J. & Rutledge, T. (2004) *Life without Ed: How One Woman Declared Independence from Her Eating Disorder and How You Can Too* USA: McGraw-Hill.

Schmidt, U. & Treasure, J. (1993) *Getting Better bit(e) by bit(e): A survival kit for sufferers of bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorders*. East Sussex: Psychology Press Ltd.

Websites

◆ <http://www.eden.org.nz>

◆ <http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org>

◆ <http://www.love-your-body.org>

◆ <http://www.bodypositive.com>

◆ <http://www.any-body.org>

◆ <http://narrativeapproaches.com>

◆ <http://www.mengetedstoo.co.uk/>

◆ <http://www.menstuff.org/issues/byissue/eatingdisorders.html>

◆ http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/svp/uhs/eating/eating-mendisorders.htm

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Contacts

Eating Difficulties Education Network (EDEN)

1 Garnet Rd, Westmere, Auckland 1022

Ph: (09) 378 9039

Email: info@eden.org.nz

Web: www.eden.org.nz

North Shore Women's Centre

5 Mayfield Rd, Glenfield, Auckland.

Ph: (09) 444 4618

Email: women.ctr@xtra.co.nz

Web: www.womyn-ctr.co.nz

EAT –Eating Awareness Team

Caretaker's Cottage,

325 Montreal St, Christchurch

Phone: (03) 366 7725 or Freephone: 0800 690 233

Email: eat@chch.planet.org.nz

Web: www.eat.org.nz

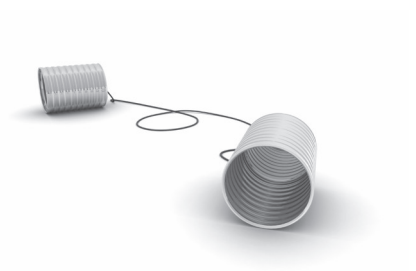
Eating Disorders Association of New Zealand (EDANZ)

(Providing support for parents and caregivers)

Phone: (09) 522 2679

Email: info@ed.org.nz

Web: www.ed.org.nz



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Regional Eating Disorders Services

(Please note, the services below can only be accessed through referral from a G.P. or specialist. If you think these services might be appropriate for you, please visit your G.P. and discuss the possibility of referral with them).

Auckland Eating Disorders Service (EDS)

Level #2, Building 14
Greenlane Clinical Centre
Greenlane Hospital
Phone: (09) 623 4650

Central Region Eating Disorder Services (CREDS)

Hutt Valley District Health Board, High Street
Lower Hutt
Phone: (04) 461 6528
Email: creds@huttvalleydhb.govt.nz

Christchurch Eating Disorders Service

The Princess Margaret Hospital
Cashmere Road, Christchurch
Phone: (03) 337 7707
Email: eds@cdhb.govt.nz



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