

MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE

RECOVERING BODIES:

OVERCOMING EATING DISORDERS

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DEFINITIONS

People with **Anorexia Nervosa** may refuse food altogether; vomit or use laxatives to purge food; and/or exercise to excess. Signs include: rapid or extreme weight loss; strange eating rituals; depression and social isolation; and secretiveness and lying - especially about food.

People with **Bulimia** often ingest large quantities of food then attempt to rid themselves of it through vomiting, abusing laxatives, and/or over-exercising. Signs include: disappearing to the bathroom after eating; obsessively exercising; eating large amounts of food; stealing food from roommates; feeling depressed.

People who **Compulsively Overeat** are typically overweight due to their habit of eating excessive amounts of food, even when they may feel uncomfortably full. This condition is marked by a compulsive need to eat due to feeling out of control around food, and is not characteristic of all overweight people.

Please Note: The Media Education Foundation cannot take responsibility for the advice or treatment received through the contacts offered in this resource and discussion guide.

RESOURCES

Print

For General Introductions

- A Hunger So Wide and So Deep: American Women Speak Out on Eating Problems by Becky Thompson.
- The Body Betrayed: Women, Eating Disorders and Treatment by Kathryn Zerbe.
- Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders by Fallon, Katzman & Wooley.

For Self-Help and Recovery

- Feeding the Hungry Heart; When Food is Love; and Why Weight? A Guide to Compulsive Overeating all by Geneen Roth.
- French Toast for Breakfast: Declaring Peace with Emotional Eating by Mary Anne Cohen.
- Overcoming Overeating by Hirschmann and Munter.

Advice to Loved Ones

- Reviving Ophelia by Mary Pipher.
- Surviving an Eating Disorder: Strategies for Families and Friends by Siegal, Brisman and Wienshel.

Responses to Fat Oppression

- Big Fat Lies by Glenn Gaesser.
- Fat is Not a Four-Letter Word by Charles Roy Schroeder.
- Self-Esteem Comes in all Shapes and Sizes: How to be Happy and Healthy at Your Natural Weight by Carol A. Johnson.

On Societal Pressures to be Thin

- Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women by Susan Faludi.
- Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance by Wendy Chapkis.
- The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity by Kim Chernin.
- Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media by Susan Douglas.
- The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf.

Also, check out the extensive offerings from Gurze Books, who specialize in books and videos on eating disorders.

Call: 1-800-756-7533 or write: P.O. Box 2238, Carlsbad, CA 92018.

Internet

Web pages are known to come and go, but you could try searching with keywords "eating disorders," "anorexia," "bulimia," "overeating," and related terms. Useful web sites we found were:

Mental Health Net: <http://mentalhelp.net/>

National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance <http://NAAFA.org>

Help Lines

For advice, support, local resources and contacts:

ANAD: (847) 831-3438

AABA: (212) 278-0697

ANRED: (541) 344-1144

MEDA: (617) 738-6332

The National Center for Overcoming Overeating: (212) 875-0442

NEDO: (918) 481-4044

Overeaters Anonymous: Look in White Pages for the OA nearest you.

Local

Other places you might search to find local treatment, support and guidance are university and college health services (even if you are not a student they can refer you); your local health services; the library; and the Yellow Pages. Try to find out as much as possible about the organization or practitioner before you commit yourself to a course of therapy or treatment.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

It is important to establish that anything participants discuss is confidential. Be prepared for the possibility that someone in the group may disclose - maybe for the first time - that s/he has an eating disorder. Have a list of local resources on hand.

Below are some questions you might introduce to start people talking, as well as some suggested responses in case you get stuck.

- **Was there anything in the video that struck you as interesting, disturbing or surprising?**
- **What challenges face people during their time at college which may make them more vulnerable to an eating disorder?** Possibilities may include: academic and/or athletic pressures; separation from family; new social situations; issues of sexuality; dining commons and lack of control over food. Do not let the conversation deteriorate into a moan about how bad the dining commons food is!
- **What factors might protect people from eating disorders?** Consider the following: people's cultural backgrounds (since not all ethnic groups endorse the dominant, white view of the ideal body); the family's approach to food and body size; people's coping mechanisms for stress; access to resources and support so that anxieties don't get transferred to the body.
- **Why might women contribute such a large percentage of people with eating disorders?** Possibilities might be: cultural pressures to be thin; family's anxieties about daughter's weight; unhealthy dieting behavior which establishes a distorted relationship to food. If people address the issue of why gay men might have a higher likelihood than other men of developing an eating disorder, ask them to consider the high body-consciousness of gay men's culture. Secondly, when men are subjected to starvation diets, they too resort to compulsive behavior around food.
- **Knowing that people's recovery from eating disorders are highly individual, what strategies might help?** Consider behavioral, nutritional, therapeutic, and social approaches.
- **How would you approach someone whom you believe has an eating disorder?** Suggestions: consider whether you are the best person to approach the person; be willing to deal with their anger and defensiveness (if it arises); be specific about what concerns you have; use "I" statements, as in "I feel worried when I see you losing so much weight"; recognize that recovery is a slow and often frustrating process.