

## **Eating Disorders** **A Guide to Coping Strategies**

This handout tells you ways to deal with an eating disorder. These ideas have been written by nurses who work with people who have eating disorders. Using the ideas in this guide can help you control eating disorder symptoms.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel welcome to call the number listed at the end of the handout.

### **To Improve Body Image**

- Put away your scale.
- Dress to feel comfortable.
- Draw attention to parts of your body you are proud of.
- Walk proud.
- Put away your skinny clothes.
- Start the morning with good grooming.
- Recognize that your thinking about your body may be distorted.
- Realize you are not being singled out because you think you have gained weight.
- Be comfortable and familiar with your body.

### **To Cope with Eating**

- Change the subject when other people talk about food, weight, or body size and shape.
- Set a routine – eat three well-balanced meals that are satisfying.
- Make menus for a day ahead of time and post them.
- Eat with people who support healthy eating.

- Make lunch your main meal.
- Have a back-up plan for nutrition if you can't eat a meal.
- Develop a support system for times when eating is a problem.
- Plan things to do at times when other people are snacking.
- Avoid alcohol. It is a set-up for a binge.
- Occupy yourself after a meal.
- Walk away from the table after meals.
- Plan healthy snacks.
- Eat healthy foods instead of junk foods.
- Make meals ahead of time.
- Make a date to eat with someone.
- Set your meal times 4 to 5 hours apart.
- Don't buy binge foods.
- Make a shopping list and stick to it.
- Eat before you go to a party. Do not go hungry.
- Set a time limit for eating.
- Make sure to enjoy more about your meal than just the food.
- Stay away from bathrooms after meals.
- Start the day with breakfast.
- Make decisions about eating and stick to them.
- If you have trouble knowing when you are hungry, plan to eat regularly.

### **To Control Urges to Binge**

- Work on hobbies and handcrafts.
- Go for a walk.
- Watch a movie.
- Take a risk. Do something different.
- Talk to and pet animals.
- Don't take extra money when you go out.
- Exercise.
- Shop.
- Take a nap.
- Clean (for yourself, not for others).
- Talk with someone supportive.
- Avoid the kitchen when you walk in the door.
- Listen to music.
- Take a warm shower or bath.

### **To Deal with Feelings after a Binge**

- Forgive yourself.
- Find something else to do.
- Get away from your eating place.
- Talk with someone else. You may or may not talk about your eating behaviors.
- Nurture yourself even if you don't feel like it.
- Try self-talk. Say you do not look any different than you did a few minutes ago.
- Get yourself back on track with routine eating.

### **To Improve Your Self-Esteem**

- Start the morning with self-care, grooming to feel your best.
- Acknowledge your feelings.
- Be creative (crafts, music, clothing, etc.).

- Look back on awards and achievements.
- Display a "brag wall."
- Keep a scrapbook or photo album handy to review proud moments.
- Make a checklist of accomplishments.
- Learn something new.
- Become an expert at something and talk about it.
- Assert your opinion when you feel confident.
- Take a self-defense class.
- Allow yourself to feel angry.
- Ask for help and support.
- Allow yourself to be good enough, not perfect.
- Accept compliments without reservations.
- Take a self-awareness or assertiveness class.

### **To Tell Yourself You're Okay**

- Set short term goals one day at a time.
- Look at the positives of being away from your symptoms.
- Anticipate good times and how you might handle bad times.
- Forgive yourself.
- Keep a diary and write your good and bad feelings.
- Encourage yourself with self-pep talks.
- Tell yourself that you are normal.
- Tell yourself you need to eat to keep your energy level up.
- Review your strengths.
- Mark a calendar every day you keep symptoms in control and look back at your own improvement.

- Allow yourself quiet time.
- Get satisfaction from relationships rather than from food.
- Tell yourself your number one priority is your health.
- Remember the positives of not getting involved with symptoms.

### **To Nurture and Reward Yourself**

- Shop for yourself.
- Exercise.
- Take a bath.
- Set money aside for a goal.
- Vacation.
- Wear clothes that have special meaning for you.
- Wear perfume.
- Ask someone else to give you a foot or back massage.
- Get your hair or nails done.
- Listen to music you like.
- Snuggle.
- Have lunch with a friend; make the food secondary.
- Window shop.
- Buy yourself flowers.
- Call a friend.
- Read a novel.
- Go to a movie.
- Pat yourself on the back.
- Tell yourself you have done well.
- Buy new makeup.
- Steal time for yourself even if you are busy.

### **To Deal with Feeling Isolated**

- Be a volunteer.
- Go someplace where you can be with people even if you do not want to talk.
- Call a supportive person.
- Join in a group game.

- Join an exercise class.
- Make eye contact with people around you; smile and be open to others approaching you.
- Plan activities with friends or family.
- Read to someone else.
- Develop a hobby and go to specialty meetings.
- Join a choir or a band.

### **To Deal with Tension**

- Practice deep breathing and mindfulness exercises to lessen anxiety
- Accept your feelings as they are.
- Cry, scream, let it all out.
- Shout into a pillow.
- Designate a pillow as someone you are mad at and talk to it.
- Be assertive about your rights.
- Avoid small upsets that accumulate to a big blow up.
- Exercise but remember that exercise can't replace saying what is bothering you.
- Use humor.
- Learn to relax with deep breathing or meditation.
- Practice saying your feelings to a mirror or tape recorder.
- Keep a journal.
- Change the subject.

### **To Hold Your Own Assertively**

- Expect and extend courtesy to and from everyone – even your family.
- Acknowledge the other person's rights.
- Say what you want, but be

- willing to negotiate.
- Say what you need and insist on your rights.
  - Assume you are on equal standing with everyone.
  - Allow yourself time outs to feel mentally stronger.
  - Keep good eye contact but do not stare.
  - Keep yourself open to other people by looking around.
  - Use your support system and ask for positive feedback.
  - When things are not going well, do not assume it is all your fault.

- Clarify what is going on; ask other people.
- Accept your own feelings, choose if you want to act on them.
- Understand that you may not have a choice. You may have to disagree but go along. Let people know you disagree and then get on with it.

### **Phone Numbers**

University of Wisconsin Psychiatric Institute and Clinic can be reached by calling: **(608) 263-6100.**

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2016 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4515.