

RECOVERY SESSION:

AM I SICK ENOUGH?



BODY BRAVE
recovery for every body

DISCLAIMER

This resource is a living document and is open to change. It was created by students from within the Body Brave community and may not be fully representative of the spectrum of experience. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource or lived experiences that you don't see represented here, please email us at info@bodybrave.ca.

AM I SICK ENOUGH?

Eating disorders have been acknowledged, in recent years, as being the deadliest mental illness that we study. Despite this fact, many sufferers feel as though what they are experiencing isn't "bad enough" to warrant treatment.

Due to the competitive nature of eating disorders coupled with toxicity prompted by 'diet culture' in western societies, many sufferers wonder if they are sick enough to pursue treatment, and may even feel that their eating disorder is a form of mindfulness, self-care, and health.

Some of the disconnect regarding whether an individual sees themselves as "sick enough" to receive treatment can come from narrow media portrayals of eating disorders, and what eating disorder sufferers look like, as well as the limiting criteria for eating disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

While eating disorders are recognized as a mental health issue, a lot of the criteria for a formal diagnosis relies on physical markers, such as weight or Body Mass Index (BMI). This can deter individuals from seeking timely and appropriate medical attention.

[The Deadliest Disorder](#)

[Am I Sick Enough for Treatment?](#)

[What to Do When You Feel Invalidated About Your Eating Disorder – Central Coast Treatment Center](#)

You can still be 'sick enough' to pursue treatment and recovery even if:

- Your BMI falls in the "healthy weight" classification
- You are able to function at work or school
- Your lab results are within 'normal' ranges
- You do not have a formal diagnosis
- You have never been hospitalized or received intensive inpatient care
- Someone else seems 'sicker' than you

SIGNS OF DISORDERED EATING

The earlier one can identify eating disorder/disordered eating behaviours and thoughts, whether in ourselves or others, the earlier treatment can begin, and the more recovery is possible. Here we identify some signs of eating disorders/disordered eating to look out for.

Please note: signs of specific eating disorders/disordered eating may differ from or expand upon the below lists, and can be found here.

Emotional & Behavioural

- Preoccupation with food and body image or shape, including fixation on weight, calories, dieting, or certain types/components of food(s)
- Intense fear of consuming food and/or specific types of food as well as fear of weight gain
- Specific food rituals, including: eating only certain types of foods, fixation on foods touching, not eating in front of others, skipping meals, or only eating small portions
- Frequently engaging in diets or making major changes to dietary intake patterns (e.g. cutting out specific types of food or whole food groups)
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Withdrawal from daily activities previously enjoyed
- Preoccupation with body size and/or frequent body checking
- Rigidity in behaviors and routines, and experience of extreme anxiety if these are interrupted
- Changes in mood including: flat mood or lack of emotion, irritability, anxiety, depression, and rapid changes in general mood

Physical

- Significant fluctuations in weight
- In females only: amenorrhea (i.e., loss of a period) or other menstrual irregularities
- Dental problems, including cavities, discoloration, tooth sensitivity, and enamel erosion
- Poor concentration and difficulties with sleep
- Dizziness (particularly upon standing) or fainting
- Changes in hair (e.g., thinning or dryness), skin (e.g., yellowing, dryness, or poor wound healing), or fingers (e.g., brittle nails or calluses/cuts on the top of finger joints)
- Feeling unusually cold, particularly in extremities like hands and feet, or swelling of the feet
- Weakened immunity and/or muscle weakness
- Low blood pressure
- Osteoporosis (extreme thinning of the bones), easily broken bones
- Dehydration (lack of body fluids)
- Heart arrhythmias (irregular heart beat)

HOW ARE EATING DISORDERS LINKED TO BODY IMAGE?

Body image is what you believe about your own appearance. It is defined by one's thoughts, perceptions and attitudes regarding one's physical appearance.

Having a positive body image means that an individual has a fairly accurate perception of their physical body, whereas 'body positivity' involves body acceptance, comfort and confidence in one's own body, and recognition that physical appearance has no relative impact on personal character.

While some level of negative body image can be normal, people who struggle with low body image, poor self-esteem, perfectionism, or poor stress-management. People with negative body image have a greater likelihood of developing an eating disorder and are more likely to suffer from feelings of depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and obsessions with weight loss or weight control.

A common occurrence for people who deal with disordered eating is the internal conflict regarding where their behaviour crosses a line from mindful eating to something out of their control entirely. While a major part of disordered eating is abnormal eating patterns, the key factor that differentiates unique eating habits from an eating disorder is the associated 'negative emotional baggage'.

Tips for Identifying the Eating Disorder Voice

An 'eating disorder voice' is something that many people dealing with eating disorders/disordered eating face, and that exists in the mind of the individual constantly.¹⁰ Try the below tips to differentiate your eating disorder voice from your true voice, and identify some strategies to address it.

- **Identify the tone of voice.**
 - Many times, your eating disorder voice will speak to you negatively, whereas your true internal dialogue will speak in a positive or neutral tone.
- **Anytime you notice negative self-talk, work to rewire your brain's response by practicing positive self-talk.**
 - This helps to give less power to your ED's voice, and helps you to gain control over these thoughts.
- **Consider when these thoughts occur, or what events or situations trigger your eating disorder voice.**
 - Recognizing what triggers your eating disorder voice can help to prepare oneself to those intrusive thoughts.
- **Identify and practice healthy coping strategies, like journaling or listing thoughts coming from your ED's voice.**
 - This can allow you to process the negative emotions and practice counteracting these thoughts with positive self-talk or affirmations.

YOU DESERVE RECOVERY.

You deserve to be at peace.
You deserve to be happy.
You deserve to be healthy.
You deserve to be carefree.

BODY IMAGE ACTIVITIES

Reflection Prompts

Choose a prompt to reflect on. Set a timer on your phone for 3-5 minutes and reflect on these prompts, whether in the form of writing or just thinking about them!

- *What are three things that you're grateful your body allows you to do?*
- *What are three ways your eating disorder/disordered eating has negatively impacted your life?*
- *What would you tell your younger self to help gain confidence and body image?*
- *Are you using your eating disorder to compensate for something else in your life? What might that be?*
- *Describe what making peace with your body would feel like.*
- *Think of a time when you felt really proud of yourself/your body. What were you doing in that moment?*
- *What is one thing you're looking forward to doing that your body allows you to do?*

Affirmations

Practice these affirmations to shift negative thoughts to neutral thoughts. You can memorize them and say them to yourself, put them in a note on your phone, write them on a piece of paper and carry them in your pocket, or put them on a sticky note next to your mirror.

Choose the ones that resonate with you and reach for them in moments of stress, anxiety, or low body image. These affirmations were sourced from the Intuitively You Affirmation Deck by Jenn Baswick at The Intuitive Nutritionist and 29 Positive Body Affirmations to Boost Your Body Image at Taylor's Tracks.

- I honour the space between where I am and where I want to be.
- Changing my body won't improve my body image, changing my mind will.
- My body deserves to be well-rested and rejuvenated.
- There is no such thing as perfect and that's okay.
- I am more than my physical appearance.
- My body is unique.
- My body deserves respect.
- My body deserves care.
- I am at home in my body.
- I am grateful for what my body can do.
- The weight, shape, and size of my body does not define my personal worth.
- I am practicing being comfortable in my own body.
- All bodies are good bodies, including mine.