



NEDA TOOLKIT for Parents

Treatments available for eating disorders



Standard treatments include medications (prescription drugs), various psychotherapies, nutrition therapy, other nondrug therapies, and supportive or adjunct interventions such as yoga, art, massage, and movement therapy. Some novel treatments are currently under research, such as implantation of a device called a vagus nerve stimulator implanted at the base of the neck. This stimulator is currently in use to treat some forms of depression, and it is under research for treating obesity.

The most commonly used treatments—psychotherapy and medication—are delivered at various levels of inpatient and outpatient care, and in various settings depending on the severity of the illness and the treatment plan that has been developed for a particular patient. Bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorders can often be treated on an outpatient basis, although more severe cases may require inpatient or residential treatment. The levels of care and types of treatment centers are discussed in separate documents in the tool kit. The treatment plan should be developed by a multidisciplinary team in consultation with the patient, and family members as deemed appropriate by the patient and his/her team.

Medication

Biochemical abnormalities in the brain and body have been associated with eating disorders. Many types of prescription drugs have been used in treatment of eating disorders; however, only one prescription drug (fluoxetine) actually has a labeled indication for one eating disorder, bulimia nervosa. (This means that the manufacturer requested permission from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to market the drug specifically for treatment of bulimia nervosa and that FDA approved this request based on the evidence the manufacturer provided about the drug's efficacy for bulimia nervosa.)

Most prescription drug therapy used for treatment of the disorder is aimed at alleviating major depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which often coexist with an eating disorder. Some prescription drug therapies are intended to make individuals feel full to try to prevent binge eating. Generic and brand names of prescription drugs that have been used to treat eating disorders are listed in the chart. Some of these antidepressants also can exert other effects. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors alleviate depression, but may also play a role in making an individual feel full and possibly prevent binge eating in patients with bulimia or binge eating disorder. FDA has issued a warning and labeling to prevent prescription of one particular antidepressant for eating disorders—Wellbutrin, which is available in several brand and generic formulations—because it leads to higher risk of epileptic seizures in these patients.

Psychological Therapy

Several types of psychotherapy are used in individual and group settings and with families. Patients must be medically stable to be able to participate meaningfully in any type of psychological therapy. Thus, a patient who has required hospitalization for refeeding and to stabilize his/her medical condition will ordinarily not be able to participate in therapy until after he/she has recovered sufficiently to enable cognitive function to return to normal.

A given psychologist or psychiatrist may use several different approaches tailored to the situation. The types of psychotherapy used are listed here in a chart and defined below. Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) and behavior therapy (BT) have been used for many years as first-line treatment, and they are the most-used types of psychotherapy for bulimia. CBT involves three overlapping phases. The first phase focuses on helping people to resist the urge to engage in the cycle of behavior by educating them about the dangers. The second phase introduces procedures to reduce dietary restraint and increase eating regularity. The last phase involves teaching people relapse-prevention strategies to help prepare them for possible setbacks. A course of individual CBT for bulimia nervosa usually involves 16- to 20-hour-long sessions over a period of 4 to 5 months. BT uses principles of learning to increase the frequency of desired behavior and decrease the frequency of problem behavior. When used to treat bulimia nervosa, BT focuses on teaching relaxation techniques and coping strategies that individuals can use instead of binge eating and purging or excessive exercise or fasting.

Self-help groups are listed here because they may be the only option available to people who have no insurance. However, self-help groups can also have negative effects on a person with an eating disorder if they are not well-moderated by a trained professional.

For information about what types of treatments are recommended for particular situations and types of patients, please refer to the document, **The evidence on what treatment works.**



Medication names: Generic (Brand)

Antidepressants

TRICYCLICS

- Amitriptyline (Elavil)
- Clomipramine (Anafranil)
- Desipramine (Norpramin, Pertofrane)
- Imipramine (Janimine, Tofranil)
- Nortriptyline (Aventyl, Pamelor)

SELECTIVE SEROTONIN REUPTAKE INHIBITORS (SSRIS)

- Citalopram (Celexa)
- Escitalopram (Lexapro)
- Fluoxetine (Prozac, Sarafem)
- Fluvoxamine (Luvox)
- Paroxetine (Paxil)
- Sertraline (Zoloft)

MONOAMINE OXIDASE INHIBITORS

- Brofaromine (Consonar)
- Isocarboxazide (Benazide)
- Moclobemide (Manerix)
- Phenelzine (Nardil)
- Tranylcipromine (Parnate)

TETRACYCLICS

- Mianserin (Bolvidon)
- Mirtazapine (Remeron)

MODIFIED CYCLIC ANTIDEPRESSANTS

- Trazodone (Desyrel)

AMINOKETONE

- Bupropion (Wellbutrin, Zyban): Now contraindicated for treatment of eating disorders because of several reports of drug-related seizures.

SEROTONIN AND NORADRENERGIC REUPTAKE INHIBITOR

- Duloxetine (Cymbalta)
- Venlafaxine (Effexor)

Opioid antagonist

- Naltrexone (Nalorex) (Intended to alleviate addictive behaviors such as the addictive drive to eat or binge eat.)

Antiemetic

- Ondansetron (Zofran) (Used to give sensation of satiety and fullness.)

Anticonvulsant

- Topiramate (Topamax) (May help regulate feeding behaviors.)

Other

- Lithium carbonate (Carbolith, Cibalith-S, Duralith, Eskalith, Lithane, Lithizine, Lithobid, Lithonate, Lithotabs) (Used for patients who also have bipolar disorder, but may be contraindicated for patients with substantial purging.)



Psychological Therapies

Individual psychotherapy

- Behavior therapy
- Exposure with response prevention
- Hypnotherapy
- Cognitive therapy
- Cognitive analytic therapy
- Cognitive behavior therapy (all forms)
- Cognitive remediation therapies
- Scheme-based cognitive therapy
- Self-guided cognitive behavioral therapy
- Dialectical behavior therapy
- Guided imagery
- Psychodynamic therapy
- Self psychology
- Psychoanalysis
- Interpersonal psychotherapy
- Motivational enhancement therapy
- Psychoeducation
- Supportive therapy

Family therapy

- Involving family members in psychotherapy sessions with and without the patient

Group psychotherapy

- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Psychodynamic
- Psychoeducational
- Interpersonal

Self-help groups

- ANAD (Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders)
- 12-step approaches
- Eating Disorders Anonymous
- Web-based on-line programs

Other Adjunctive and Alternative Treatments

Creative Arts Therapies

- Art Therapy
- Movement Therapy
- Psychodrama

Nutritional Counseling

- Individual, group, family, and mealtime-support therapy

Other Therapies

Although little research exists to support the use of the following interventions, individual patients have sometimes found some of these approaches to be useful, particularly as adjuncts to conventional treatments. However, these approaches should not be used in place of evidence-based treatments where the latter are available.

- Biofeedback
- Coaching
- Emailing for support or coaching
- Eye movement desensitization
- Exercise
- Journaling
- Mandometer
- Massage
- Meditation
- Relaxation training
- Yoga



Treatments Defined

Antidepressants Prescription drugs used for treatment of eating disorders and aimed at alleviating major depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder, which often coexist with an eating disorder.

Behavior Therapy (BT) A type of psychotherapy that uses principles of learning to increase the frequency of desired behaviors and/or decrease the frequency of problem behaviors. Subtypes of BT include dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), exposure and response prevention (ERP), and hypnbehavioral therapy.

Cognitive Therapy (CT) A type of psychotherapeutic treatment that attempts to change a patient's feelings and behaviors by changing the way the patient thinks about or perceives his/her significant life experiences. Subtypes include cognitive analytic therapy and cognitive orientation therapy.

Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) A type of cognitive therapy that focuses its attention on discovering how a patient's problems have evolved and how the procedures the patient has devised to cope with them may be ineffective or even harmful. CAT is designed to enable people to gain an understanding of how the difficulties they experience may be made worse by their habitual coping mechanisms. Problems are understood in the light of a person's personal history and life experiences. The focus is on recognizing how these coping procedures originated and how they can be adapted.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) CBT is a goal-oriented, short-term treatment that addresses the psychological, familial, and societal factors associated with eating disorders. Therapy is centered on the principle that there are both behavioral and attitudinal disturbances regarding eating, weight, and shape.

Cognitive Orientation Therapy (COT) A type of cognitive therapy that uses a systematic procedure to understand the meaning of a patient's behavior by exploring certain themes such as aggression and avoidance. The procedure for modifying behavior then focuses on systematically changing the patient's beliefs related to the themes, not beliefs that refer directly to eating behavior.

Cognitive Remediation Therapy (CRT) Since patients with anorexia nervosa (AN) have a tendency to get trapped in detail rather than seeing the big picture, and have difficulty shifting thinking among perspectives, this newly investigated brief psychotherapeutic approach targets these specific thinking styles and their role in the development and maintenance of an eating disorder. Currently, it's usually conducted side by side with other forms of psychotherapies.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) A type of behavioral therapy that views emotional deregulation as the core problem in eating disorders. It involves teaching people new skills to regulate negative emotions and replace dysfunctional behavior. (See also Behavioral Therapy.)

Equine/Animal-assisted Therapy A treatment program in which people interact with horses and become aware of their own emotional states through the reactions of the horse to their behavior.

Exercise Therapy An individualized exercise plan that is written by a doctor or rehabilitation specialist, such as a clinical exercise physiologist, physical therapist, or nurse. The plan takes into account an individual's current medical condition and provides advice for what type of exercise to perform, how hard to exercise, how long, and how many times per week.

Exposure with Response Prevention (ERP) A type of behavior therapy strategy that is based on the theory that purging serves to decrease the anxiety associated with eating. Purging is therefore negatively reinforced via anxiety reduction. The goal of ERP is to modify the association between anxiety and purging by preventing purging following eating until the anxiety associated with eating subsides. (See also **Behavioral Therapy**.)

Expressive Therapy A nondrug, nonpsychotherapy form of treatment that uses the performing and/or visual arts to help people express their thoughts and emotions. Whether through dance, movement, art, drama, drawing, painting, etc., expressive therapy provides an opportunity for communication that might otherwise remain repressed.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) A nondrug and nonpsychotherapy form of treatment in which a therapist waves his or her fingers back and forth in front of the patient's eyes, and the patient tracks the movements while also focusing on a traumatic event. It is thought that the act of tracking while concentrating allows a different level of processing to occur in the brain so that the patient can review the event more calmly or more completely than before.

Family Therapy A form of psychotherapy that involves members of an immediate or extended family. Some forms of family therapy are based on behavioral or psychodynamic principles; the most common form is based on family systems theory. This approach regards the family as the unit of treatment and emphasizes factors such as relationships and communication patterns. With eating disorders, the focus is on the eating disorder and how the disorder affects family relationships. Family therapies may also be educational and behavioral in approach.

Hypnbehavioral Therapy A type of behavioral therapy that uses a combination of behavioral techniques such as self-monitoring to change maladaptive eating disorders and hypnotic techniques intended to reinforce and encourage behavior change.



Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) IPT (also called interpersonal psychotherapy) is designed to help people with eating disorders identify and address their interpersonal problems, specifically those involving grief, interpersonal role conflicts, role transitions, and interpersonal deficits. In this therapy, no emphasis is placed directly on modifying eating habits. Instead, the expectation is that the therapy enables people to change as their interpersonal functioning improves. IPT usually involves 16 to 20 hour-long, one-on-one treatment sessions over a period of 4 to 5 months.

Light therapy (also called phototherapy) Treatment that involves regular use of a certain spectrum of lights in a light panel or light screen that bathes the person in that light. Light therapy is also used to treat conditions such as seasonal affective disorder (seasonal depression).

Mandometer Therapy Treatment program for eating disorders based on the idea that psychiatric symptoms of people with eating disorders emerge as a result of poor nutrition and are not a cause of the eating disorder. A mandometer is a computer that measures food intake and is used to determine a course of therapy.

Massage Therapy A generic term for any of a number of various types of therapeutic touch in which the practitioner massages, applies pressure to, or manipulates muscles, certain points on the body, or other soft tissues to improve health and well-being. Massage therapy is thought to relieve anxiety and depression in patients with eating disorders.

Maudsley Method A family-centered treatment program with three distinct phases. During the first phase parents are placed in charge of the child's eating patterns in hopes to break the cycle of not eating, or of binge eating and purging. The second phase begins once the child's refeeding and eating is under control with a goal of returning independent eating to the child. The goal of the third and final phase is to address the broader concerns of the child's development.

Mealtime Support Therapy Treatment program developed to help patients with eating disorders eat healthfully and with less emotional upset.

Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) A treatment based on a model of change, with focus on the stages of change. Stages of change represent constellations of intentions and behaviors through which individuals pass as they move from having a problem to doing something to resolve it. The stages of change move from "pre-contemplation," in which individuals show no intention of changing, to the "action" stage, in which they are actively engaged in overcoming their problem. Transition from one stage to the next is sequential, but not linear. The aim of MET is to help individuals move from earlier stages into the action stage using cognitive and emotional strategies.

Movement/Dance Therapy The psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process that furthers the emotional, cognitive, social, and physical integration of the individual, according to the American Dance Therapy Association.

Nutritional Therapy Therapy that provides patients with information on the effects of eating disorders, techniques to avoid binge eating, and advice about making meals and eating. For example, the goals of nutrition therapy for individuals with bulimia nervosa are to help individuals maintain blood sugar levels, help individuals maintain a diet that provides them with enough nutrients, and help restore overall physical health.

Opioid Antagonists A type of drug therapy that interferes with the brain's opioid receptors and is sometimes used to treat eating disorders.

Pharmacotherapy Treatment of a disease or condition using clinician-prescribed drugs.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation A deep relaxation technique based on the simple practice of tensing or tightening one muscle group at a time followed by a relaxation phase with release of the tension. This technique has been purported to reduce symptoms associated with night eating syndrome.

Psychoanalysis An intensive, nondirective form of psychodynamic therapy in which the focus of treatment is exploration of a person's mind and habitual thought patterns. It is insight oriented, meaning that the goal of treatment is for the patient to increase understanding of the sources of his/her inner conflicts and emotional problems.

Psychodrama A method of psychotherapy in which patients enact the relevant events in their lives instead of simply talking about them.

Psychodynamic Therapy Psychodynamic theory views the human personality as developing from interactions between conscious and unconscious mental processes. The purpose of all forms of psychodynamic treatment is to bring unconscious thoughts, emotions and memories into full consciousness so that the patient can gain more control over his/her life.

Psychodynamic Group Therapy Psychodynamic groups are based on the same principles as individual psychodynamic therapy and aim to help people with past difficulties, relationships, and trauma, as well as current problems. The groups are typically composed of eight members plus one or two therapists.

Psychotherapy The treatment of mental and emotional disorders through the use of psychological techniques designed to encourage communication of conflicts and insight into problems, with the goal being symptom relief, changes in behavior leading to improved social and vocational functioning, and personality growth.



Psychoeducational Therapy A treatment intended to teach people about their problem, how to treat it, and how to recognize signs of relapse so that they can get necessary treatment before their difficulty worsens or recurs. Family psychoeducation includes teaching coping strategies and problem-solving skills to families, friends, and/or caregivers to help them deal more effectively with the individual.

Self-guided Cognitive Behavior Therapy A modified form of cognitive behavior therapy in which a treatment manual is provided for people to proceed with treatment on their own, or with support from a nonprofessional. Guided self-help usually implies that the support person may or may not have some professional training, but is usually not a specialist in eating disorders. The important characteristics of the self-help approach are the use of a highly structured and detailed manual-based CBT, with guidance as to the appropriateness of self-help, and advice on where to seek additional help.

Self Psychology A type of psychoanalysis that views anorexia and bulimia as specific cases of pathology of the self. According to this viewpoint, people with eating disorders cannot rely on human beings to fulfill their self-object needs (e.g., regulation of self-esteem, calming, soothing, vitalizing). Instead, they rely on food (its consumption or avoidance) to fulfill these needs. Self psychological therapy involves helping people with eating disorders give up their pathologic preference for food as a self-object and begin to rely on human beings as self-objects, beginning with their therapist.

Supportive Therapy Psychotherapy that focuses on the management and resolution of current difficulties and life decisions using the patient's strengths and available resources.

Telephone Therapy A type of psychotherapy provided over the telephone by a trained professional.