



# Seeking Treatment: What Does Treatment Involve?

Eating disorders are serious health conditions that can be both physically and emotionally destructive. It is important that people with eating disorders seek professional help. If not identified or treated in their early stages, eating disorders can become chronic, debilitating, and even life-threatening conditions. Early diagnosis and intervention significantly enhance recovery.

**Treatment is available. Recovery is possible.**

## What Does Treatment Involve?

The most effective and long-lasting treatment for an eating disorder is some form of psychotherapy or psychological counseling, coupled with careful attention to medical and nutritional needs. Ideally, this treatment should be tailored to the individual and will vary according to both the severities of the disorder and the patient's particular problems, needs, and strengths.

- Psychological counseling must address both the eating disordered symptoms and the underlying psychological, interpersonal, and cultural forces that contributed to the eating disorder.
  - The individual needs to learn how to live peacefully and healthfully with food and with themselves.
  - Typically care is provided by a licensed health professional, including but not limited to a psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, nutritionist, and/or medical doctor.
  - Care should be coordinated and provided by a health professional with expertise and experience in dealing with eating disorders.
- Many people with eating disorders respond to outpatient therapy, including individual, group, or family therapy and medical management by their primary care provider. Support groups, nutritional counseling, and psychiatric medications under careful medical supervision have also proven helpful for some individuals.
- Hospital Based Care (including inpatient, partial hospitalization, intensive outpatient and/or residential care in an eating disorders specialty unit or facility) is necessary when an eating disorder has led to physical problems that may be life-threatening, or when it is associated with severe psychological or behavioral problems.
- The exact treatment needs of each individual will vary. It is important for individuals struggling with an eating disorder to find a health professional they trust to help coordinate and oversee their care.



# Questions to Ask When Considering Treatment Options

There are many differing approaches to the treatment of eating disorders. No one approach is considered superior for everyone, however, it is important to find an option that is most effective for your needs. The following is a list of questions you might want to ask when contacting eating disorder support services. These questions apply to an individual therapist, treatment facility, other eating disorder support services, or any combination of treatment options.

- 1. What is your experience and how long have you been treating eating disorders?**
- 2. How are you licensed? What are your training credentials? Do you belong to the Academy for Eating Disorders (AED)?**  
*AED is a professional group that offers its members educational trainings every year. This doesn't prove that individuals are up-to-date, but it does increase the chances.*
- 3. What is your treatment style?**  
*Please note that there are many different types of treatment styles available. Different approaches to treatment may be more or less appropriate for you dependent upon your individual situation and needs.*
- 4. Do you or your facility have a quality improvement program in place or regularly assess the outcome of the treatment provided?**
- 5. Are you familiar with either the APA Guidelines or Britain's NICE Criteria for the treatment of eating disorders?** *For APA see: [http://www.psych.org/psych\\_pract/treatg/pg/prac\\_guide.cfm](http://www.psych.org/psych_pract/treatg/pg/prac_guide.cfm) and for NICE see: <http://www.nice.org.uk/pdf/cg009niceguidance.pdf>.*
- 6. What kind of evaluation process will be used in recommending a treatment plan?**
- 7. What kind of medical information do you need? Will I need a medical evaluation before entering the program?**
- 8. What is your appointment availability? Do you offer after-work or early morning appointments? How long do the appointments last? How often will we meet?**
- 9. How long will the treatment process take? When will we know it's time to stop treatment?**
- 10. Are you reimbursable by my insurance? What if I don't have insurance or mental health benefits under my health care plan?**  
*It is important for you to research your insurance coverage policy and what treatment alternatives are available in order for you and your treatment provider to design a treatment plan that suits your coverage.*
- 11. Ask the facility to send information brochures, treatment plans, treatment prices, etc. The more information the facility is able to send in writing, the better informed you will be.**

With a careful search, the provider you select will be helpful. But, if the first time you meet with him or her is awkward, don't be discouraged. The first few appointments with any treatment provider are often challenging. It takes time to build up trust in someone with whom you are sharing highly personal information. If you continue to feel that you need a different therapeutic environment, you may need to consider other providers.



## **Questions to Ask Your Treatment Provider**

Now that you have chosen a treatment provider, here are some helpful questions you might want to consider asking in your first meeting. Remember that at any time during treatment, you can raise questions and consult your treatment provider regarding areas of concern.

- 1. What is the diagnosis?**
- 2. What treatment plan do you recommend?**
- 3. Will you or someone else conduct the treatment? If someone else, does that person work for you or would this be a referral? Will you supervise the treatment or who is the team leader?**
- 4. What other professionals will you be collaborating with during the treatment?**
- 5. Is a physician an integral part of the team?**
- 6. What are the alternative treatments?**
- 7. What are the benefits and the risks associated with the recommended treatment? With alternative treatments?**
- 8. What will be the sequence of treatment strategies?**
- 9. Are there any physical complications of the eating disorder that need to be treated?**
- 10. Are there any associated psychiatric disorders that will need to be treated?**
- 11. What role will family members or friends play in the treatment process?**



## **How to be Part of the Treatment Team: Questions for Parents & Families to Ask**

Support from parents and family is a crucial part of the treatment process. Below are some questions you can ask the treatment provider to assist you in providing the best support possible for your loved one. Remember you may need to be proactive to help ensure the communication process flows smoothly. And don't forget to find support for you! As a parent, family member, or friend it is easy to overlook the self-care you need while you are focused on your loved one's recovery. To find a family support group check the Treatment Referrals section of NEDA's website ([www.NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://www.NationalEatingDisorders.org)) or ask the treatment provider helping your loved one if they offer or have a recommendation for one.

- 1. How can I help to support my family member during treatment? What is my role within the treatment?**
- 2. How often will you talk to me about my family member's progress?**
- 3. What if my family member doesn't want to participate in therapy?**
- 4. How will the family be prepared for the patient to return home (if in a treatment center)?**
- 5. What books, websites or other sources of information would you recommend?**
- 6. How much weight gain should be expected in what time period if my loved one has anorexia nervosa? What can I do to support my family member during a time of weight gain?**
- 7. Is it my responsibility to monitor re-feeding and/or weight? What procedures should we follow for weighing?**
- 8. How do family members determine if purge behavior is occurring in the home setting? What action should we take if we notice this behavior?**
- 9. If my family member is being treated as an outpatient, how will the team decide if more intensive intervention is needed?**
- 10. How do I assess if the treatment personnel are functioning as a team?**  
*Ask how often the team members communicate with each other. Remind and encourage the treatment team members to communicate with one another, which is especially important for those in separate locations such as in outpatient treatment. Even if the team doesn't talk to each other, you can serve as a liaison to relay information.*
- 11. If I become anxious about my family member or if problems are experienced, who should I call?**

