

## Eating Disorders (ED) Begin Early

- 10 % diagnosed in children < 10 yrs old
- One third of all diagnosed as preteens. (1)
- As early as age 6, it's common for girls to voice concern about their weight or shape. (2)
- 40-60% of elementary school girls (ages 6-12) are have weight concerns or worry about becoming too fat. (2)

## Warning Signs of ED in Children

- Anxiety surrounding food.
- Sudden changes in eating habits.
- Notable increase in exercise or movement.
- Concern about their body or weight.
- Unexpected weight loss or gain.\* (2)

\* *"This is tricky because childhood and early adolescence is a time of many bodily changes including weight gain or loss, but if a child stops growing or gains weight rapidly, consult a pediatrician"*. (2)

## Common Terms

Body Dissatisfaction - Negative body image .

Disordered Eating - Unhealthy relationship with food. Abnormal eating behaviors & attitudes. (13)

Eating Disorder - Serious but treatable mental illnesses.

The Thin Ideal - Media and cultural portrayal of an unrealistic body size. (13)

Weight Stigma & Bias - Negative attitudes, and discrimination due to weight. (14)

## Resources & References

[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)  
[www.myedin.org/children.html](http://www.myedin.org/children.html)  
[www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/](http://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/)

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# TEACHING HEALTHY EATING HABITS & POSITIVE BODY IMAGE TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GIRLS & BOYS IN A CULTURE OF DISORDERED EATING.



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**For parents and teachers:  
Introduction to early eating  
disorder prevention and  
awareness in girls & boys  
ages 6 - 12.**

## What Causes the Development of An Eating Disorder?

- The causes can be a mix of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. (3)
- Body dissatisfaction (in any size body) .
- The “thin ideal” that our culture promotes.
- Bullying, and weight stigma. (2)
- Parent's (usually mother's) own dieting and restrictive eating rules placed on child (4)
- Psychological trauma (causing neurobiological impact) such as: family trauma (parent's divorce, violence, abuse, death, perfectionist parents, and attachment issues). (3)
- Causes and symptoms include: stress, unexpressed feelings, anger, low-self esteem, post traumatic stress disorder, and extreme anxiety. This can result in the stress response “fight or flight” and impulse control or reactivity issues. (5) Fear shuts down the prefrontal cortex part of the brain (decision making area), preventing the person from making choices. (6)
- Depression, anxiety, OCD, & other mental illnesses occur frequently with eating disorders. These issues can be the root cause. (6b)

## Nutrition & Lifestyle Guidelines

### Focus on the positive aspects of food.

- Enjoy preparing food & eating together
- Avoid labeling food as bad or good, unhealthy or healthy, (7) forbidden etc. (8)
- Avoid any form of diet talk, restriction etc. in front of children.

### Honor Children's Innate Hunger & Satiety Cues

Allow them to self-regulate their food intake.

Never force them to take x number of bites or clean their plates.

Provide balanced meals & snacks at set times.

Allow children to choose what to eat, in what order, and how much. (8)

### Change Body Image & Weight Related Attitudes

Be mindful of body image talk. Don't let your kids hear you say you hate x part of your body.

Kids take all of it in!

Teach children about body diversity. (7)

People come in all shapes and sizes. Sizes change throughout the lifespan.

### Feelings

Encourage the expression of feelings directly through talking.

Be present and fully listen to your child, allowing them full permission to freely express a range of feelings. (10)

## NUTRIENT SUPPORT

If your child has an inadequate intake of a variety of foods, or is vegan or vegetarian, is dieting or restricting, the following is recommended as a general guideline. (4) *(Consult with a nutritionist for a customized plan)*

- Multivitamin/mineral supplement meeting 100% of the daily value.
- Vitamin D3 (lack of vitamin D can contribute to depression) 600 to 1000 IU per day. (10) Many multivitamins do not contain enough Vitamin D.
- Essential fatty acids (EFA's) – Important for growth & development; brain & nerve function. (10) Omega-3 may have a therapeutic benefit in 6-12-year-old children with major depression. (9)
- Also: B12, calcium, iron, zinc, vitamin C

### What if my child is overweight?

Parental pressure, restriction, and control backfires often resulting in the child's intake of “forbidden” foods accompanied by negative feelings.

Dieting in childhood can lead to obesity in adulthood. It can also be a factor that contributes to eating disorders. (4)

Many children grow naturally & consistently at or above the overweight and obesity BMI percentiles and are healthy. Address weight gain by following Satter's division of responsibility. Allow the inherent natural ability with food regulation, restore eating and growth that is right for him or her. (12)