

What to Expect During Eating Disorder Treatment

Treating eating disorders is hard. For those in treatment, there will be physical changes. For parents/guardians choosing treatment, there may be resistance from your child or teen. Here are some tips to navigate the experience.

Types of Eating Disorder Treatment

Eating disorder treatment is different for each person. Here are the most common options:

Outpatient treatment

This is for those with mild eating disorders. It can also be for those stepping down from higher levels of care. It includes visits with a therapist, dietitian and sometimes a medical provider. This allows the person to maintain their regular routine while getting support.

Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP)

This offers more frequent therapy sessions (three to five times per week). It's for those who need more support but not full-time supervision.

Partial Hospitalization Programs (PHP)

This option offers treatment five to seven days a week. This can include meal monitoring but allows the person to return home at night. It is appropriate for those who need comprehensive care but not full-time support.

Residential/Inpatient Treatment

For severe cases, this option provides 24/7 supervision. This is necessary when the eating disorder has severely impacted health. Individuals can focus only on recovery without distractions.

[More on Page 2](#)



Treatment for eating disorders can vary and include outpatient, intensive outpatient (IOP), partial hospitalization (PHP), residential/inpatient, or some combination over time.

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Physical changes are okay

Depending on the eating disorder, individuals may see rapid change in their weight. For example, someone with binge eating disorder or bulimia may see sudden weight loss. Those struggling with anorexia or other restrictive disorders will likely see weight gain. These are necessary steps toward recovery.

Be ready for emotional reactions

For parents, deciding to send a child to treatment is difficult. It's common for children or teens to feel angry. This is a normal reaction. Those with eating disorders are usually attached to harmful habits and may not understand the need for change.

Expect resistance

Many children will push back at first. They may accuse you of being a bad parent or feel betrayed. This comes from fear and anxiety about losing control over their eating habits.

Stay firm

Be consistent with your decision. Your child may not see the potential long-term damage of their habits. Your decision to seek treatment can save their life, even if they don't see it that way.

Know that they will understand in time

During treatment, children may realize how much their eating disorder was controlling them. Most children come to understand that their parents made the right decision.

#PracticeNourishment #FeedingHope

If you or someone you know is struggling with food and body image concerns, it's important to seek professional help. You can find additional resources through the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) or call the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders (ANAD) Helpline at 888-375-7767.