

## **EATING DISORDERS**

### **Making treatment work – taking charge of change**

#### **There are two approaches to making treatment work;**

1. Work with experts who know how to help you and where shared responsibility is established
2. Be informed by experts and work together with your teenager where you are responsible for his/her meals and there is an agreement on how to manage a variety of behaviours.

#### **Approach 1: Working with experts**

There are a number of treatments available including outpatient, day-patient and in-patient treatments and these usually include a mix of psychological, nutritional and medical treatments at an individual, family and group level.

This document focuses on:

#### **Approach 2: Working with your teenager**

Here is how you can be directly involved in implementing change;

- Step 1: Establish a baseline
- Step 2: List your aims
- Step 3: Recognise change
- Step 4: Evaluate change

#### **Step 1: Establish a baseline**

1. Make sure your teenager is physically not at risk by consulting your gp.
2. Get dietetic advice on a suitable eating programme.
3. Get a psychiatric/psychological evaluation of your teenager and discuss with the professional involved what you plan to do and how this is in line with what the professional may identify as your teenagers needs.
4. Get shared backing from your partner/spouse and the rest of the family.
5. Explain what you intend to do with your teenager and get them involved in the steps ahead.
6. Devise some specific targets for change.
7. Be available and pretend to invest in making the programme work. This may mean significant change to your and the whole family's programmes.

8. Know when to begin to back off.
9. Take care of yourself. You are your teenagers best hope.

## Step 2: List your aims

### stem4-Eating Disorder: recommended potential eating disorder checklist

1. Length of time allocated to implement programme  
e.g. We will take two months leave to focus on establishing a regular eating plan.
2. Aims for this time  
e.g. To establish an eating routine, to introduce certain food groups regularly to meals, to stabilise weight, to help my teenager eat more etc.

#### Meal times

- Agree that parents will take responsibility for buying, cooking and presenting food.
- Be available for all meal times.
- Always have same people supervising meals.
- Have an agreed meal and snack plan.
- Agree on how much should be eaten at any one sitting.
- Agree on how long it takes to eat each meal.
- Arrange where the meal should be eaten.
- Agree who should provide encouragement and support and how to manage things not going to plan e.g. dealing with food refusal.
- Help expand food choices.
- Challenge food restrictions e.g. vegetarianism, especially if they started around the same time as the eating disorder.

*NB. See example mealtime plan and example food lists on page 4*

3. Weight related issues
  - Having clear guidelines of how weight will be gained or lost.
  - Having same person weigh your teenager at the same time in the same clothes.
  - Banning obsessive weighing.
4. Help your teenager limit exercise  
This should be a gradual reduction to no more than 3 hours a week.  
Get a health check first.
5. Help your teenager prevent binge eating
6. Help your teenager prevent purging

For 5 and 6 it will be useful to involve a psychologist in assessing the behaviours and helping implement change. However, a first step towards assessment is monitoring and you could start a diary.

*NB. See example food diary on page 4*

### **Binge eating: 3 main reasons for bingeing**

Binges happen when;

1. Eating is irregular
2. You throw up
3. Weight is low

### **Establishing a regular eating pattern**

- 3 meals and 2 snacks are ideal.
- Have a regular amount of carbohydrates.
- Minimise the opportunity to binge eat by having meals with others.
- Stick to the meal plan whether you throw up or not.
- Throw away laxatives.
- Keep busy after meals to avoid the urge to throw up.
- Don't avoid food group since these will be the ones you binge on. It is better to gradually include all food groups but you could start with easier to eat food and work up to harder to eat foods.

### **Guidelines for parents of teenagers and young people who binge**

- Avoid shopping for large quantities of food in one time.
- Minimise stocks of food at home.
- Buy regular size portions rather than the value large portions.
- Buy food yourself rather than give cash for your teenager to buy food.
- Try and keep food for the whole family the same and avoid 'spoiling' one or more family members with special food.
- At the beginning of the eating plan, avoid having highly tempting food in the house or on display.

**Example: My agreement**

Day	Meal	Meal Length	Where eaten	Who is present	Who is in charge
Monday	Breakfast	15 mins	Kitchen	Mum & Dad	Mum & Dad
	Snack	10mins	School nurse office	School nurse	School nurse
	Lunch	30 mins	School Hall	Friends & teacher	Teacher
	Snack	15 mins	Kitchen	Mum	Mum
	Dinner	45 mins	Kitchen	Mum & Dad	Mum & Dad
	Snack	15 mins	Kitchen	Dad	Dad

**Example: My agreement**

**I agree** with my parents that over the next thirty days, I will:

1. Eat meals as planned
2. Will eat within stipulated period of time
3. Will eat at agreed place
4. Will sit with the person supervising me for at least half an hour after
5. Agree to the toilet being locked for an hour after
6. Agree to not exercise for at least two hours after eating my main meals
7. Agree to have a build-up drink for a meal that I am unable to finish as agreed

**Signed:**

**Example: Food diary**

Day / Time	What I ate	Binge?	What I did
<b>Monday</b>			
7am	Half cereal bar	No	Went to school Talked to
10am	Half cereal bar	No	friends
1pm	Sandwich Chocolate	Yes	Didn't need chocolate so consider it a binge
3pm	2 chocolates	Yes	Threw up
8pm	Dinner Packet of biscuits Milk-shake	Yes	Threw up

**Food Lists:  
Agreed food lists**

<p><b>Stage 1</b> Cereals: Weetabix, Cornflakes, Museli Bread, rice, oatcakes, couscous Spreads: Flora, Olivio Jam, honey, eggs Protein: Chicken, fish and how it will be cooked. Tofu, Quorn, nuts for vegetarians Fruit: Strawberries, raspberries, apples, pears, kiwi Vegetables: all Semi-skimmed milk, half-fat yoghurt, smoothies, Kit-kat or similar</p>
--

### Stage 2

As stage 1 but also to include:

Range of cereals  
Pasta, potatoes  
Butter, peanut butter  
Bananas, grapes  
Protein: cooked in alternative ways  
Dessert  
Nuts  
Milkshakes

### Stage 3

As stages 1 and 2, but also to include:

All other food categories including eating out

*Further reading: Nutritional guidelines (2006) [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)*

### Step 3: Recognise change

- Rewarding change is an invaluable tool in reinforcing new behaviour
- Set up a regular system of monitoring your goals together and of finding ways of rewarding your teenager for their achievements and continuing to devise incentives for continuing with and maintaining change
- Rewards can also be accumulated – example one clear week of eating at regular times means I can buy something I like for £20 from Topshop
- Rewards can get more challenging to earn as new behaviour easier
- Do not work on too many target behaviours at the same time

### Example: My reward chart

Target	Achievement		My reward
To eat at regular times	Mon	Y / N	15 minutes extra on facebook
	Tues	Y / N	Got to see friends in the park
	Wed	Y / N	Went out with Mum
	Thurs	Y / N	15 minutes extra on facebook
	Fri	Y / N	

#### **Step 4: Evaluate change**

- Evaluating change and working out what works and changing what doesn't should be an ongoing focus
- When to introduce the next change should also be evaluated
- Maintaining change needs regular monitoring
- Relapse should be seen as part of recovery and the challenge is to get back on track as quickly as possible

#### **References / further reading**

- Anorexia nervosa, a survival guide for families, friends and sufferers, Janet Treasure, Routledge 2000
- Eating Disorders, A Parents Guide, Rachael Bryant-Waugh and Bryan Lask, Penguin 2004
- Skills-based Learning for Caring for a Loved One with an Eating Disorder, Janet Treasure, Drainne Smith and Anna Crane, Routledge 2007
- National Guidelines (2006) [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)