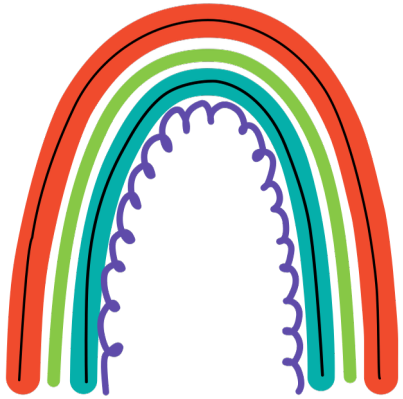
THE EATING DISORDER

RECOVERY DECK



For Teens in Recovery and
Their Loved Ones

EATING DISORDERS ARE NOT A CHOICE



THEY ARE BRAIN-BASED, & GENETICALLY-INFLUENCED

THIS ILLNESS WAS NOT YOUR FAULT



BUT RECOVERY IS YOUR ACHIEVEMENT!

Filled with bite-sized reminders, tips,
and tools to navigate the ups and downs
of recovery in a world
over-run with diet culture.

- Evidence-based info
- Coping strategies
- Self-care practices
- Affirmations
- Journal or discussion prompts

WHAT CAUSES EATING DISORDERS

It'scomplicated,and more research is needed! But here is what we know:



- Eating disorders are brain-based.
- Genetics play a role as well.
- And something in the environment pulls the trigger
- Sometimes a calorie deficit alone – intentionally or not – can start the downward spiral
- Temperament traits like "high error detection" (perfectionism) and "low interoceptive awareness" (easily ignoring hunger or fatigue cues)

Take heart: in recovery, the temperament traits can become superpowers by focusing them not on your body but on your passions.

This illness was NOT YOUR FAULT!

- No one CHOOSES to have an eating disorder.
- No one GIVES someone an eating disorder.

AND RECOVERY IS WORTH CELEBRATING!

Your recovery is a testament to your incredible STRENGTH and the devoted support of all who love you.



Be proud.
Be brave.
Safeguard your recovery.
And trust that you can handle hard things!

I am stronger than anyone knows!

RECOVERY =
SELF-CARE + PREVENTION



MOVE FORWARD, NEVER FORGET

RECOVERY =
PURR-SISTANCE



AND YOU ARE WORTH EVERY PAW-SITIVE STEP!

RECOVERY =
FREEDOM



FREEDOM FROM ED RULES AND FREEDOM TO LIVE FULLY

Doctors compare a recovered ED patient to an athlete healed from an old injury.



An athlete with a bad ankle may need to leave extra time to stretch, take extra breaks, and wear a strong brace.



Similarly, people in recovery will need to eat regularly scheduled meals, "talk back" to diet culture, and use strong coping skills to handle anxiety and upset.



In both cases, a new normal – different from someone without that history – is necessary to thrive.

My body deserves kindness and care.

WHAT IS RECOVERY?

Recovery is the brave and ongoing journey of embracing and caring for your true self, free from the shadows of an ED. And it's about claiming a future filled with meaning, purpose, and joy!

Recovered individuals live life on their own terms, steering clear of harmful thoughts and behaviors. They nurture a balanced lifestyle, recognize personal challenges, and prioritize positive coping skills and self-care for a strong and vibrant life.



I choose a life of balance, purpose, & joy.

RECOVERY IS HARD WORK, BUT FREEDOM IS WORTH IT

You know how precious freedom from the eating disorder is. Recovery means freedom from rules about what, when, and how much to eat, what your body should look like, and what you have to do to "earn" food or rest. Those rules don't belong to you, and learning to reject those rules protects your recovery.

Freedom to eat with friends, try new things, rest when you're tired, and spend your energy on the people and passions that make your life yours. That's a life filled with meaning, purpose, and joy.

I choose freedom over ED's rules.

ED'S ARE LIFE THREATENING



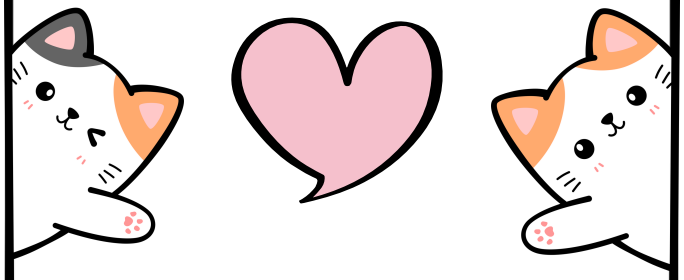
THIS SEROIUS MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER IS NOT A PHASE OR OR A JOKE

SLIP-UPS HAPPEN



RESPOND WITH CURIOSITY AND TAKE ACTION

IT'S OKAY (AND IMPORTANT) TO ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED



IT JUST TAKES PRACTICE!

IN OUR CULTURE, EDs ARE EASILY MISSED

ED behaviors are often overlooked as a phase or even praised because they look like embracing fitness, clean eating, or a "glow up." Sometimes EDs can be laughed off as a personality quirk. Often sufferers don't even recognize the depths of their disorder. And yet, this disorder is serious and dangerous.

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM DANGERS?

Without proper care, eating disorders can lead to dangerous health complications and hardships like

- heart problems
- bone loss
- social isolation
- diminished quality of life
- loss of relationships
- Sadly, EDs are the second deadliest mental health disorder, after heroin overdoses

I take the risks seriously to stay well.

Some days, recovery might feel a little harder. This might look like:

- stress or a full schedule interrupts nutrition
- the ED voice gets louder
- rules creep back in
- the urge to check, compare, or measure returns
- or something else is off, and only you can see it

Any one of these is enough to take action.

What to do: call someone you love, someone who knows your story, let them know you need support.

My first call is: _____

I reach out to my people, I don't wait for things to get hard.

When something feels triggering or unsafe, it's okay to speak up at whatever level feels right.

Just the ask: "Can we talk about something else. Dieting and weight loss are kind of a thing for me."

The short version: "I had an eating disorder a few years ago. I'm doing well, but diet talk is still hard. Could we talk about something else?"

The whole story: only if you want to, and only with people who've earned it.

Just remember, other people's food choices are not your job to fix.

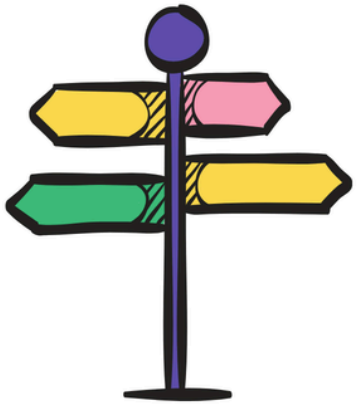
I will speak up to protect my recovery.

SYMPTOMS OF AN EATING DISORDER IMPACT EVERY SYSTEM IN THE BODY



THE WHOLE BODY POWERS DOWN

EVERYONE'S ED JOURNEY IS DIFFERENT



BEWARE OF COMPARING!

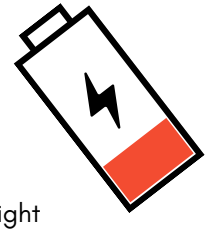
FOOD IS MEDICINE



REGULAR, VARIED NUTRITION POWERS A FULL LIFE

Physical Symptoms of a Restrictive ED

- Fatigue, Dizziness, or lightheadedness
- Difficulty focusing
- Feeling cold all the time
- Slow digestion, constipation, bloating
- Weakened muscles
- Dry skin
- Brittle nails
- Thinning hair
- Low BP and low heart rate
- Cardiac complications
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Distorted body image
- Food restriction & or over exercise
- Preoccupation with food



I nurish my body to power my life.

Every ED patient travels a different path.

Behaviors. Severity.
Length of acute illness.
Levels of care. Treatment options.



Don't let comparisons diminish your progress.

Focus on your path and celebrate your own growth.

Avoid detailed specifics with others in recovery.

Remember, recovery isn't about outdoing someone else's timeline or experience; it's about finding what works for you and embracing your own healthier, happier life.

My journey is my own; I honor it.

Regular meals & snacks help every body!



Your brain requires regular nutrition to function well.



Anxiety and strong emotions are easier to regulate with steady nutrition.



For people with a history of E.D.s, regular nutrition throughout the day is KEY to preventing relapse and living a full, joyful life.

I will look ahead & make a plan!

On busy days make a plan for when, where, and what (meals + snacks) will fuel you.

ALL FOODS FIT!



FOOD "RULES" IGNORE THE MANY ROLES FOOD PLAYS IN OUR LIVES.

THE ONLY FOOD RULES YOU REALLY NEED



CAN YOU GUESS?

NUTRITION HEADLINES AREN'T MEANT FOR YOU



IT'S LESS "SCIENCE" THAN SUGGESTION, AND DOESN'T APPLY TO ED FOLKS

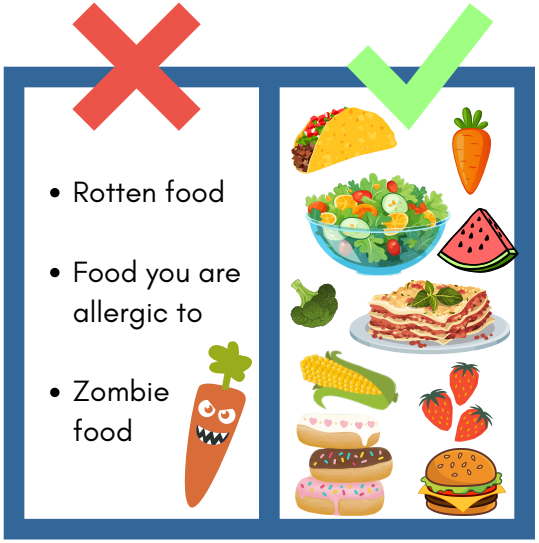
All foods fit because



Food is fuel.
Food is medicine.
Food is comfort.
Food is celebration.
Food is heritage.
Food is exploration.
Food is creativity.
Food is necessary.

And above all, food is what got you well, and what keeps you safe.

Food powers life.

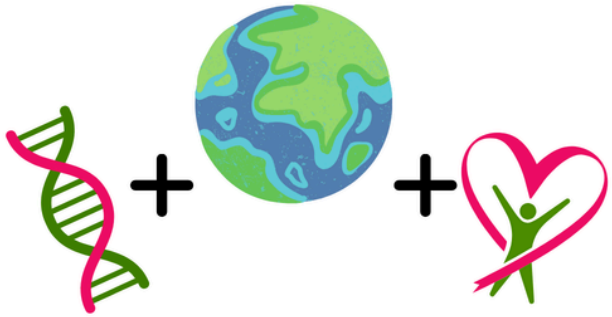


I'm choose flexibility around food.

- **Every Body is Different!** What works for one person might not work for another due to genetics, metabolism, and lots of other things.
- **Nutrition is hard to study.** Double blind, long-term studies aren't realistic, so the field relies on questionnaires, observational methods, and self-reporting.
- **Industry funding plays a huge role:** Researchers often have direct or indirect connections to industries that stand to gain from certain findings.
- **Contradictions are every where. Reversals are common.** For example, in the last 30 years, milk, eggs, and traditionally-farmed vegetables have all been villainized and redeemed in various studies.

I don't take health advice from headlines.

YOU ARE MORE THAN WHAT YOU EAT



GENETICS + CIRCUMSTANCE + HABITS = HEALTH OUTCOMES

Nutrition gurus, food companies, and many in the medical community will say "*you are what you eat*" or insist that careful, strict food choices are essential.

Researchers who study what actually shapes how long and how well people live estimate health roughly this way:

- 30% the genes you were born with
- 20% circumstances (income, neighborhood, environment)
- 40% everyday behaviors
- 10% access to medical care

And "behaviors" are more than food. Sleep, movement, stress, connection, smoking, alcohol. Your food choices are one element of one element.

I will take care of myself in ways that makes sense for my body.

REMEMBER DIET CULTURE IS BIG BUSINESS



THE GLOBAL WELLNESS INDUSTRY IS A $6.8 TRILLION MONEY MAKER (IN 2024)

Just some of the odd gimmicks advertised to "sell" the manufactured thin ideal:

1900s: novel diet pills featured arsenic and tapeworms
1920s: cigarettes!
1930s: those weird vibrating belts that "melt away" fat
1940s: diet pills now included speed (meth)
1950s: gyms memberships featuring calisthenics
1960s: bariatric surgery! plus groups like weight watchers
1970s: the "atkins" (now KETO) diet vs. low-fat trends
1980s: Jenny Craig launched + low-fat, low-cal everything
1990s: South Beach diet + low carb everything
2000s: juice cleanses, my fitness pal calorie tracker
2010s: "clean" eating, whole 30, lots of protein powders
2020s: GLP1s, unregulated supplements and ultraprocessed food fear

I don't buy into harmful fads.
(Read "Anti-Diet" by Christy Harrison for more.)

BMI IS BULL$!#T



TELL YOUR FRIENDS!



BMI was invented in the 1830s by a mathematician/astronomer defining the perfect "man" (literally) and was adopted by the early eugenics movement.



In 1998, prodded on by researchers associated with Weight Watchers and the makers of the lethal diet drug fen-phen, the NIH changed the BMI thresholds, creating an obesity epidemic overnight. Also:

- Category cut offs are arbitrary
- Ignores fat vs. muscle
- Ignores ethnic and gender differences
- Other factors are much more informative for making health decisions.

BMI is nonsense. A number from the 1830s doesn't get to define me.

PRIORITIZE RECOVERY DURING BIG LIFE CHANGES



TRANSITIONS CAN BE TRICKY, GIVE YOURSELF GRACE

Big changes, good or bad, can rattle recovery.

- Starting college
- Dating someone new
- Landing a new job
- Moving
- Failing a Class
- Breaking up
- Losing a job
- Getting sick

Life's transitions remake our routines and may raise the risk of falling into old behaviors, even when the change is a happy one.

Protect your nutrition plan and adjust everything else around it. And lean on your favorite coping skills (protecting sleep, meditating, calling loved ones).

During this transition, I am gentle with myself.

BECOME A TALKBACK CHAMPION



COLLECT YOUR FAVORITE COMEBACKS TO THE WORST OF WELLNESS CULTURE

We can't control what others say, even if we wish they wouldn't bring diet culture to the party. But we can arm ourselves with a quick response. Here are a few examples. What would ou add? How would your respond?

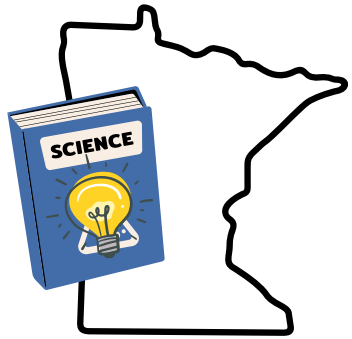
"I can't eat for a week after this."
Bodies aren't bank accounts. We don't have to earn, save up, or pay back our food.

"Shrinking for the wedding." / "Beach Body for the Trip"
Restricting + excessive workouts before a big event drains the energy and mood you want and saps your ability to enjoy it.

"I'm on detox" / "Cleanse."/ "Clean eating."
My liver and kidneys already handle this. The wellness version is marketing.

Good for You, Not for Me

WHAT WAS THE MINNESOTA STARVATION STUDY?



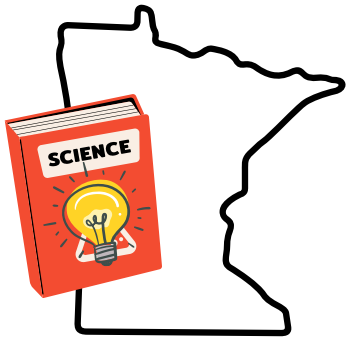
PART 1 OF 4 ON THE MOST SCIENTIFIC INSIGHT INTO THE IMPACT OF STARVATION

In 1944, as World War II left millions hungry, University of Minnesota researcher Ancel Keys set out to learn how to help starving people recover. Thirty-six healthy young men, conscientious objectors who volunteered in place of military service, ate normally for three months, then lived on half rations for six months, then were slowly refed.

This experiment is a big deal in understanding nutrition and recovery. Many "ED symptoms," anxiety, rigid thinking, and obsessive tendencies to name a few, turned out to be starvation symptoms, and they showed up in healthy, well-adjusted men. They also disappeared as the men fully recovered, usually after two or three years with full nutrition.

What my brain does when it's underfed isn't who I am.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS ARE PROFOUND



PART 2 OF 4
OF THE MN STARVATION STUDY

As the men went hungry, their minds changed. They became irritable, anxious, and depressed. They pulled away from friends, lost interest in things they used to love, and struggled to concentrate.

Food took over their thoughts. They collected recipes, read cookbooks for hours, dreamed about meals, and developed rituals like eating very slowly or cutting food into tiny pieces.

Sound familiar? The obsession wasn't a personality flaw or a series of bad choices. It was the brain's instinctive response to not having enough fuel.

Food thoughts are a hunger signal, not a character flaw.

EARLY RECOVERY CAN FEEL WORSE THAN THE ILLNESS



PART 3 OF 4
OF THE MN STARVATION STUDY

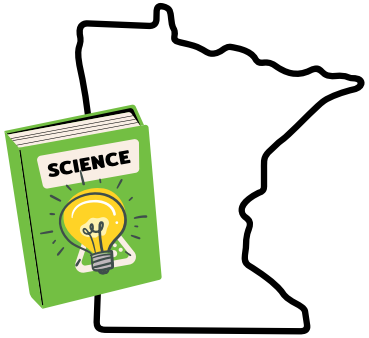
When the men in the study began eating more, they didn't feel better right away. Many felt worse: intensely hungry or bloated and full no matter how much they ate, still preoccupied with food, emotional, and uncomfortable - sometimes to the extreme - in their changing bodies.

For some, getting back to normal took many months.

This difficulty is not a sign recovery is failing. It's a sign the body and brain are repairing. Though this part of the struggle is in your rearview mirror, understanding it may help make sense of your experience.

Feeling worse before you get better is part of the process.

HALF-RECOVERED ≠ RECOVERED



PART 4 OF 4
OF THE MN STARVATION STUDY

During refeeding, the men were split into groups getting different amounts of extra food. Those who got only a little more barely improved. Their mood, energy, and food obsession stayed stuck.

Real recovery came only when they ate enough, consistently, for long enough.

Recovery doesn't happen by eating "a bit more than before." It happens by giving your body everything it needs, every day, even after you feel okay.

I choose consistent nutrition because I choose full recovery.