



# The Physician's Role in Eating Disorders Prevention

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**Primary Prevention:** Reducing or eliminating the problem by understanding and addressing causes and risk factors. Physicians are doing primary prevention whether they know it or not when they:

- Educate patients about nutrition
- Play role of health educator
- Encourage healthy physical activity
- Promote positive body image
- Help families to communicate effectively, have healthy relationships, and build self-esteem
- Guide parents and children through the challenges of growth and individuation

**Secondary Prevention:** Identifying the problem early, before it becomes severe. Physicians play an important role by:

- Noticing changes in physical parameters such as growth, weight, vital signs
- Sharing concerns and providing initial counseling
- Educating patients about the importance of adequate nutrition and health habits
- Consulting to schools, athletic organizations, and other influential groups

**Tertiary Prevention:** Developing strategies to keep the problem from getting worse. Again, physicians are unique in their ability to:

- Refer for appropriate therapy by knowing the resources in their area
- Break the denial by giving an historic perspective of their observations of the patient's condition and potential consequences of the eating disorder
- Educate patients about the positive benefits of treatment
- Monitor medical status and keep patients stable while treatment proceeds
- Set a positive example of needing others by collaborating and communicating with mental health professionals
- Advocate for appropriate care when third party payers deny it



# **Recommended Reading**

Compiled by Margo Maine, PhD

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For more information on eating disorders visit:

Academy for Eating Disorders: [www.aedweb.org](http://www.aedweb.org)

National Eating Disorders Association: [www.NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://www.NationalEatingDisorders.org)



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