

# Assisting Physicians in Eating Disorders Prevention



National Eating Disorders Association

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As health professionals, physicians play an integral role in educating and assisting individuals who may be struggling with body image, eating, or weight concerns. In today's world, physicians are experiencing an increased burden to know about and screen for a variety of physical and psychological conditions. We can help physicians to identify patients with eating disorders by providing resources and training to screen for early signs and symptoms, address concerns with sensitivity, stabilize medical complications, and initiate an appropriate referral. Without education, physicians may inadvertently minimize risk, or miss an opportunity to stabilize a condition until appropriate treatment can be arranged.

## Entry Points

There are many ways, both formal and informal to influence physicians.

- Let your physicians and as many other physicians as possible know about NEDA.
- If you are a treatment professional, do the same when talking to your patients' doctors. Also make physicians aware of your available services to prevent and treat eating disorders.
- Offer to provide an in-service to the other physicians and staff of their professional association.
- Contact your state medical society. Offer to write an article for their newsletter. Give them literature from NEDA.
- Find out if there is a local branch of the Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychiatric Association, Society of Adolescent Medicine, or American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Offer to give a presentation at a local meeting.
- If you are near a teaching hospital or medical school, contact the coordinators of the medical school curriculum. Offer to provide a lecture or lead a discussion group. Also, contact the director of residency training for pediatrics, psychiatry, family medicine, internal medicine, and ob-gyn. Offer to lecture at Grand Rounds or other medical meetings. Consider inviting residents to meet with groups of clients or individuals you work with to learn from them as experts on the personal experience of an eating disorder.

## **Danger Zones**

Physicians, despite good intentions, sometimes make the following mistakes. By developing an ongoing collaborative relationship, you may help them avoid these.

- Setting or agreeing to an artificially low body weight
- Sharing own concerns with food, weight, body image
- Expressing negative feelings regarding fat people
- Being over-concerned about the increase in obesity and therefore unable to identify pathogenic weight control
- Supporting restrictive dieting
- Not working collaboratively with other providers
- While attempting to support the patient or family, undermining treatment and reinforcing resistance