

THE RECOVERY JOURNEY

An eating disorder support group organization compiled the following suggestions for recovery from support group members. The following are items from their study that proved to be most helpful in overcoming an eating disorder. Some items were extremely helpful to some individuals and not as helpful to others. The helpful items have been classified into the following categories: (1) Accept, (2) Talk, (3) Listen, (4) Practice (5) Persevere.

(1) Accept:

- a. That you are worthwhile, simply because you are who you are, not for what you do.
- b. That there is no such thing as perfection. Striving for it to the exclusion of your personal physical and mental health can perpetuate the eating disorder.
- c. That you are a social being, intended to be in relationships with others. Social withdrawal serves to promote the loneliness and depression.
- d. The fact that you use food in order to avoid feelings and should learn constructive ways to deal with these feelings.
- e. The fact that food is fuel and meant to be used rather than abused or ignored. To have a healthy body and mind as well as healthy self-esteem, moderate amounts of nutritious food is essential.
- f. That anger is a part of life. To ask if you have the right to be angry is to ask if you have the right to be thirsty. Accept your anger and learn to deal with it assertively.

(2) Talk:

- a. Deal with the denial. Because an eating disorder is usually secretive and there may be a sense of shame, it may be difficult for you to tell others about it. Begin by sharing your secret with a trusted friend, family member, or therapist and ask for support. This is the beginning of the recovery process-to move from denial to acceptance that there is a problem and that you need help and support.
- b. Uncover your hidden feelings and share with others in a support group. You may have anger, resentment, or fear that has been suppressed and food may be used to cover up these feelings. When you share your feelings in a supportive environment, you will find that others feel much the same way you do, and this may dispel some of your self-contempt.
- c. Seek out a therapist who is well versed in the treatment of eating disorders so that you can explore further your deeper feelings and learn more adaptive ways to deal with them rather than abusing food or abstaining from food.
- d. Use self-talk to set up a dialogue with yourself when you have the urge to binge and purge or to fast. Let the “strong you” win over the “weak you” when the urge to abuse food is present.

(3) Listen:

- a. To your inner voice so that you can discern what your feelings are. Hear the “inner child” who may be demanding, rebellious, needing to please, and respond with your “nurturing parent” for guidance, comfort, and self-love.

- b. To others who have recovered and may have helpful resources for you.
- c. To professionals who have researched and treated eating disorders and have discovered techniques that may be helpful to you. You can do this by reading self-help literature, seeking professional help or reading recent research studies.
- d. To your inner resources of determination, patience, courage to reframe these for use in recovery. Change the determination “to be thin at all costs” to determination “to be healthy and happy again.”

(4) Practice:

- a. Eating three varied and balanced meals or six mini-meals during the day. See a nutritionist to help you with a good management program. Nutritionists are employed by your community health department and may be available to you with little or no cost.
- b. Assertiveness skills. Try to let go of the “should statements” and begin to practice “I need,” “I want,” or “I feel” statements instead. Examine our need to please others at the exclusion of pleasing yourself.
- c. Letting go of your self-defeating messages and change them to more adaptive ones. Change “I can’t” to “I choose not to” or “I’m not good enough” to “I want to do better next time.”
- d. Keeping daily logs of your urge to binge/purge or fast and note the intensity of that desire. Write down your thoughts, emotions, and methods used to avoid the dysfunctional behavior.
- e. Substitute an activity (talking with friends, hobbies) when you have the urge to binge/purge or fast. Make these activities moderate ones rather than convert one obsession for another.
- f. Relaxation techniques. Take deep breaths and let them out slowly or listen to relaxation cassettes in order to let go of pressure and tension that may lead to maladaptive behaviors.
- g. Setting short-term goals, such as being your best friend for one complete day.
- h. Meditation or prayer to call on your inner resources and spiritual power.

(5) Persevere:

- a. Hang in there when things get tough. It is easy to fall back into self-defeating practices, especially when things in your environment have not changed. By taking one step at a time and forgiving yourself for a temporary relapse, you will soon see yourself as a recovered person. Recovery is seldom linear. There are usually peaks and valleys for a time. But as you continue to uncover your feelings and deal with them constructively, you will go on to more rewarding things in your life.
- b. So that you can be helpful to others who are struggling with an eating disorder. By sharing your experiences and feelings, you can defuse some of the shame and mystery surrounding eating disorders. You can also help each other in maintaining recovery.

