

Understanding Eating Disorders During the Perinatal Period and Finding Resources

Tuesday, August 26, 2025

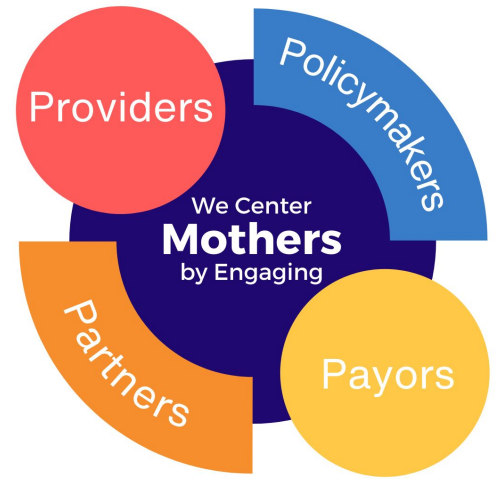




Welcome

Joy Burkhard, MBA
Executive Director
Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health

www.PolicyCenterMMH.org



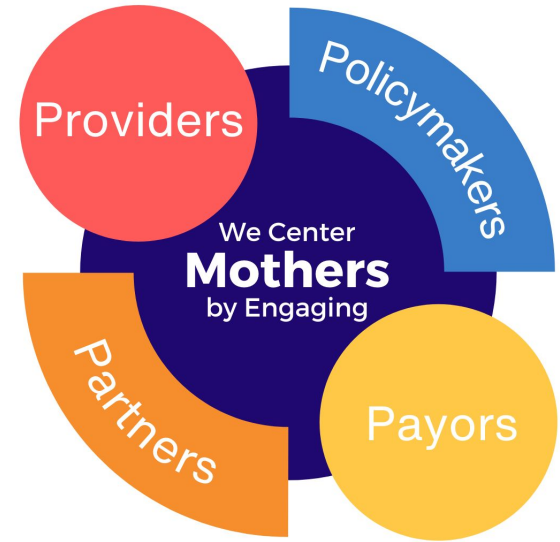
Our Mission & Vision

Mission

To close gaps in maternal mental health care

Vision

All pregnant and postpartum mothers have ready access to standardized, evidence-based maternal mental health care from providers they respect and trust.



Presentation by: Doreen Marshall, PhD



**Chief Executive Officer
National Eating Disorders Association**

Understanding Eating Disorders



www.nationaleatingdisorders.org



Prioritize Self-Care

Check in with yourself and if you start to feel uncomfortable it's okay to take a break.





Learning Objective

S Recognize the signs of an eating disorder.

- Be prepared to have a conversation.
- Encourage help-seeking.
- Find resources for help and support.

Why is this work important?

- Early detection and treatment of an eating disorder improves treatment outcomes.
- Learning information about how to identify an eating disorder can allow you to recognize when help may be needed.





Self-Reflection Activity

“Confronting and breaking free from bias requires active participation and a commitment to continuous self-reflection and learning.”
– Michelle Obama

Who do eating disorders affect?



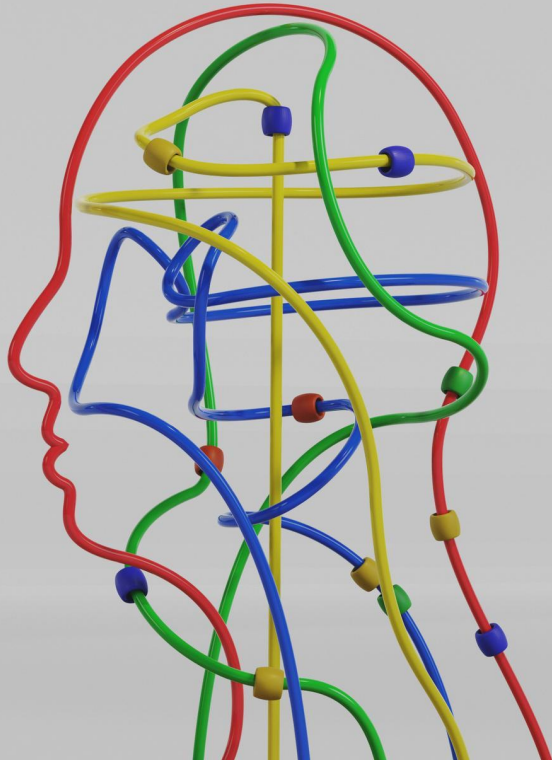
Anyone

People of all genders, ages, races, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, body shapes, and weights can be affected.

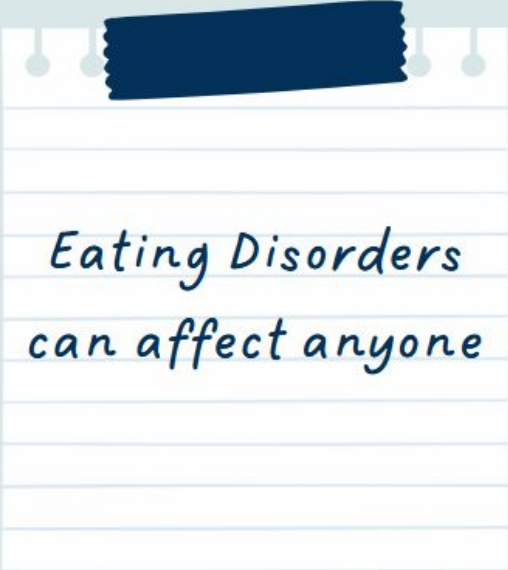
30 million

People affected by eating disorders at some point in their lifetime.

What are Eating Disorders?



- Real, life-threatening mental and physical illnesses that can have fatal consequences.
- Involve a person's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors around weight, food, and size that severely impair functioning in major areas of their life.
- No single cause, but rather a combination of biological, psychological, and sociocultural risk factors.



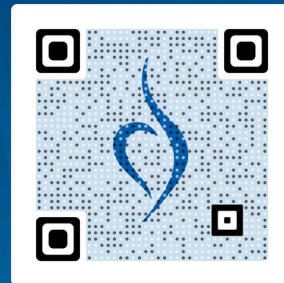
*Eating Disorders
can affect anyone*

5 Facts About Eating Disorders

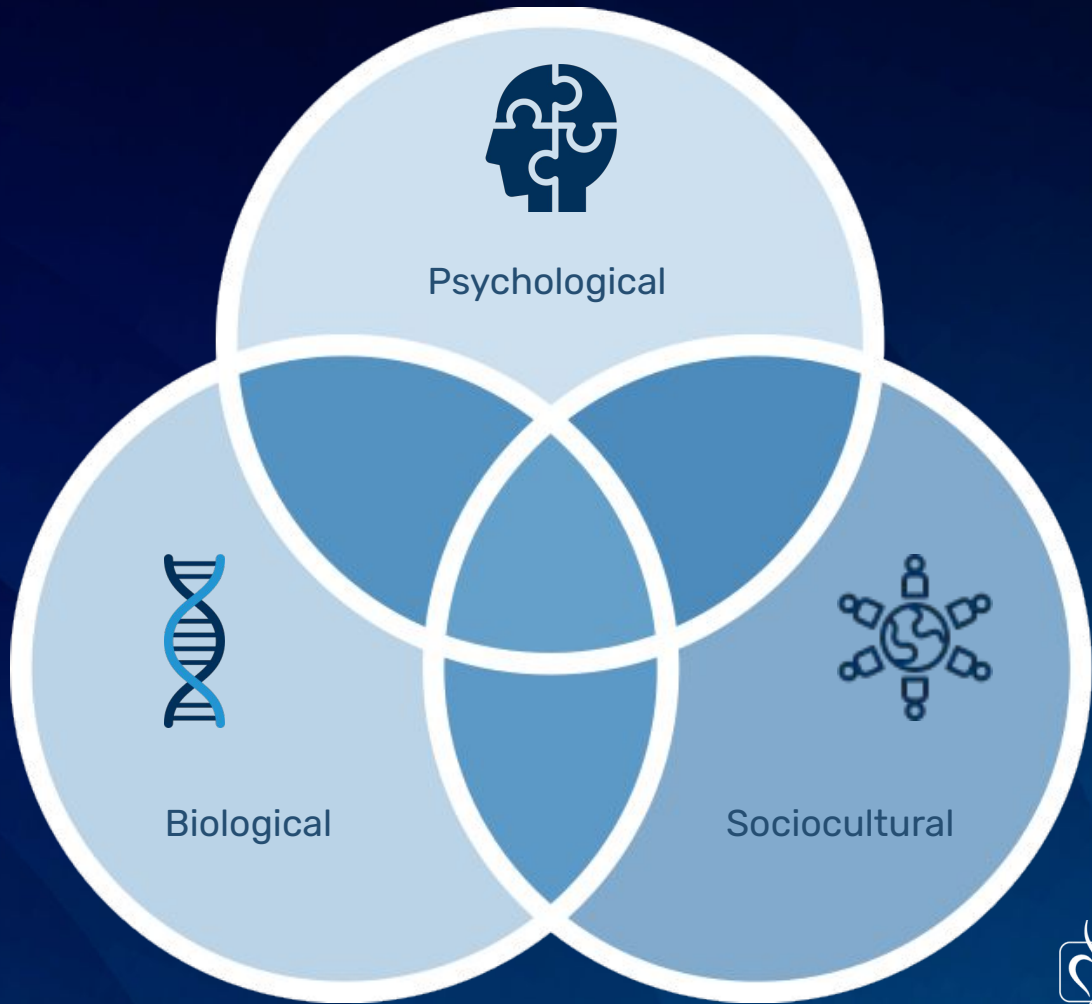
- 1 Eating disorders can affect anyone.
- 2 Eating disorders are not a choice.
- 3 Eating disorders impact daily life and relationships.
- 4 Eating disorders carry an increased risk for suicide and medical complications.
- 5 Full recovery from an eating disorder is possible.

Types of Eating Disorders

- Anorexia Nervosa (AN)
 - Bulimia Nervosa (BN)
 - Binge Eating Disorder (BED)
 - Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorders (OSFED)
 - Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)
 - Disordered Eating (Orthorexia)
- Scan for more information:



Risk Factors

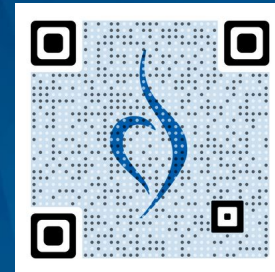


Behavioral Warning Signs



- Changes in eating behaviors.
- Will only eat certain textures of food.
- Frequently checks mirror for perceived flaws in appearance.
- Becomes more isolated and secretive.
- Extreme mood swings.
- Excessive exercise.

Scan for more information:

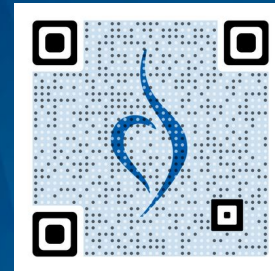


Emotional Warning Signs



- Feeling out of control and/or shame when eating.
- Weight loss, dieting, and control of food are primary concerns.
- Preoccupied with body size, shape and appearance.
- Frequently experiences low self-esteem.
- Fears of choking or vomiting.

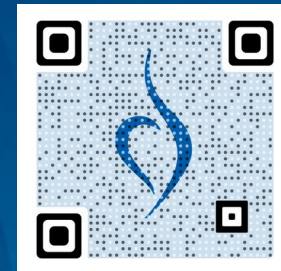
Scan for more information:



Physical Warning Signs

- Noticeable weight fluctuations, both up and down.
- Gastrointestinal complaints.
- Dizziness when standing.
- Difficulty concentrating, sleeping.
- Issues with dental, skin, hair and/or nail health.

Scan for more information:



SYMPTOMS

Complications of Disordered Eating During Pregnancy

Risks for the Pregnant Person

- Poor nutrition and dehydration
- Cardiac irregularities
- Gestational diabetes
- Severe depression
- Premature birth
- Labor complications
- Difficulties nursing
- Postpartum depression

Risks for the Baby

- Poor development
- Premature birth
- Low birth weight
- Respiratory distress
- Feeding difficulties
- Other perinatal complications

Scan for more information:





Complications of Eating Disorders During

Anorexia

- Underweight and inadequate weight gain during pregnancy.
- Increased risk of low birth weight and related infant health problems.

Bulimia Nervosa

- Purging increases risk of dehydration, chemical imbalances, cardiac irregularities.
- Pregnancy heightens these health risks.

Binge Eating Disorder

- Often linked to weight gain.
- Higher risk of high blood pressure and gestational diabetes.

**Treatment
Recommendations
/
Guidelines for
OBGYNs**



Screening & Identification



- Ask directly about eating, weight, and body image concerns at first appointment.
- Use validated tools (SCOFF, ESP).
- Ask open ended questions.
- Look for red flags.
- Consider menstrual history as an early screening cue.



Psychological & Behavioral Support

- Provide supportive language.
- Encourage open conversation about fears or triggers.
- Create a plan for emotional distress.
- Normalize conversations about changing body image and pregnancy weight gain.
- Offer psychoeducation on the effects of malnutrition.
- Refer to pregnancy-specific support groups for eating disorders.



Medical Monitoring & Management

- Conduct weight checks sensitively.
- Screen for complications.
- Address physical symptoms promptly.
- Conduct regular labs.
- Monitor vitals.
- Screen for gestational diabetes (OGTT).
- Adjust weight gain expectations with context.
- Be vigilant for re-emergence of purging behaviors.



Nutritional Management

- Offer “blind weighing” when needed.
- Provide nutrition counseling focused on pregnancy-specific needs.
- Emphasize adequate caloric and nutrient intake.
- Discuss and address fears about weight gain and pregnancy-related body changes.
- Refer to perinatal dietitian experienced in eating disorders.
- Avoid overly focusing on weight numbers—emphasize balanced nutrition and fetal growth instead.



Team-Based, Culturally Responsive Care

- Refer to and coordinate with a multidisciplinary team.
- Include family/partner in support when appropriate.
- Consider cultural, trauma, and identity factors when discussing body image and food.
- Adjust birth plans if malnutrition or complications pose medical risks.
- Refer early to a multidisciplinary team.
- Schedule more frequent prenatal visits to monitor maternal and fetal well-being.
- Coordinate with the patient's therapist or eating disorder specialist to align treatment goals.



How to Help

- Learn.
- Plan ahead.
- Be direct and express concern.
- Suggest seeking help.



Postpartum Planning

- Prepare for high postpartum relapse risk by scheduling mental health and nutrition follow-ups before birth.
- Monitor for postpartum depression and anxiety alongside eating disorder symptoms.
- Support breastfeeding decisions without shaming.
- Provide body image support as the body transitions post-birth.



What to Avoid

- Placing shame, blame, or guilt.
- Making rules or promises.
- Giving simple solutions.
- Invalidating their concerns.
- Giving advice.
- Ignoring or avoiding the problem.

Additional Information



- Allow for a range of reactions.
- Know that taking the first step can be scary and challenging.
- Encourage them to get a medical check-up.
- Focus on what they are willing to address first.
- Explore why the person wants to get well.

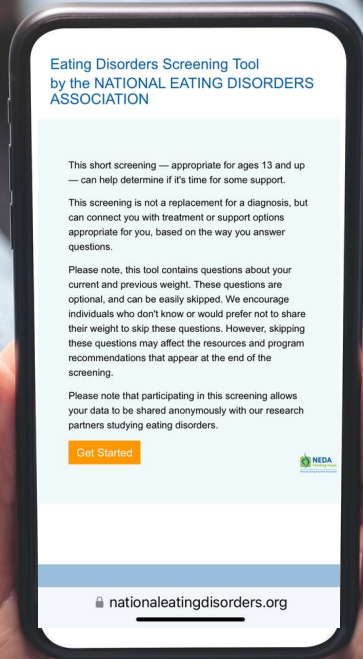
Next

Steps:

Resources



Eating Disorders Screening Tool



- Helps determine if someone is at risk for an eating disorder.
- Connects those who screen at risk for an eating disorders to resources.

**Scan to connect
to screening
tool:**



**Scan to learn about
hosting a screening
event:**

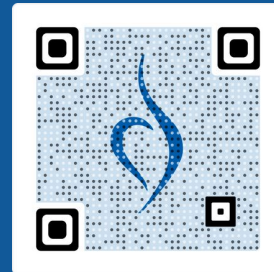


Grace Holland Cozine Resource Center



- Find information and resources for every stage of recovery.
- Read stories of lived experience.
- Find treatment and free and low cost support.

Scan for Resource Center:



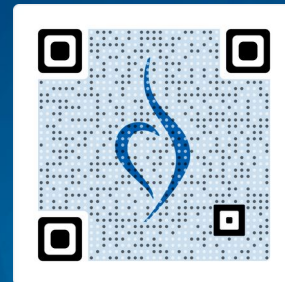
How to Get Involved



Join a community committed to supporting those impacted by eating disorders by getting involved with:

- Campus Warriors
- NEDA Cares Events
- Awareness Campaigns

Scan to find ways to get involved:





Self-Reflection Activity

- Think of one thing you didn't know before the presentation.
- Think of one action you could take to apply this information.



Brief Survey

Please take this brief survey:



Thank You!



www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

Slide #4:

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Slide #5:

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Slide #6:

Deloitte Access Economics. (2020). *The Social and Economic Cost of Eating Disorders in the United States of America: A Report for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Academy for Eating Disorders*. Available at:

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Slide #7:

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Slide #8:

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Brennan, C., Illingworth, S., Cini, E., & Bhakta, D. (2023). Medical instability in typical and atypical adolescent anorexia nervosa: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of eating disorders*, 11(1), 58. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-023-00779-y>.

Slide #9 Continued:

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Dunn, T. M., & Bratman, S. (2016). On orthorexia nervosa: A review of the literature and proposed diagnostic criteria. *Eating behaviors*, 21, 11–17. [Pereira, R. F., & Alvarenga, M. \(2007\). Disordered eating: Identifying, treating, preventing, and differentiating it from eating disorders. *Diabetes Spectrum*, 20\(3\), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.2337/diaspect.20.3.141>](#)

Pereira, R. F., & Alvarenga, M. (2007). Disordered eating: Identifying, treating, preventing, and differentiating it from eating disorders. *Diabetes Spectrum*, 20(3), 141–148. <https://doi.org/10.2337/diaspect.20.3.141>

Slide #10:

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Slide #11

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Slide #12

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Slide #13

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5-TR. American Psychiatric Association Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>

Q&A



Doreen Marshall, PhD
Chief Executive Officer
National Eating Disorders
Association



Joy Burkhard, MBA
Executive Director
Policy Center for Maternal
Mental Health

Save the Date



Save the Date

2026

Maternal Mental Health

FORUM

A Time of Transformation



March 17-18

POLICY CENTER
FOR Maternal Mental Health™

Learn More: <https://policycentermmh.org/forum/>

Save the Date

Thursday
September 4, 2025

10:30am-12:00pm
Pacific Time

Perinatal Mental Health 101

Training
Webinar



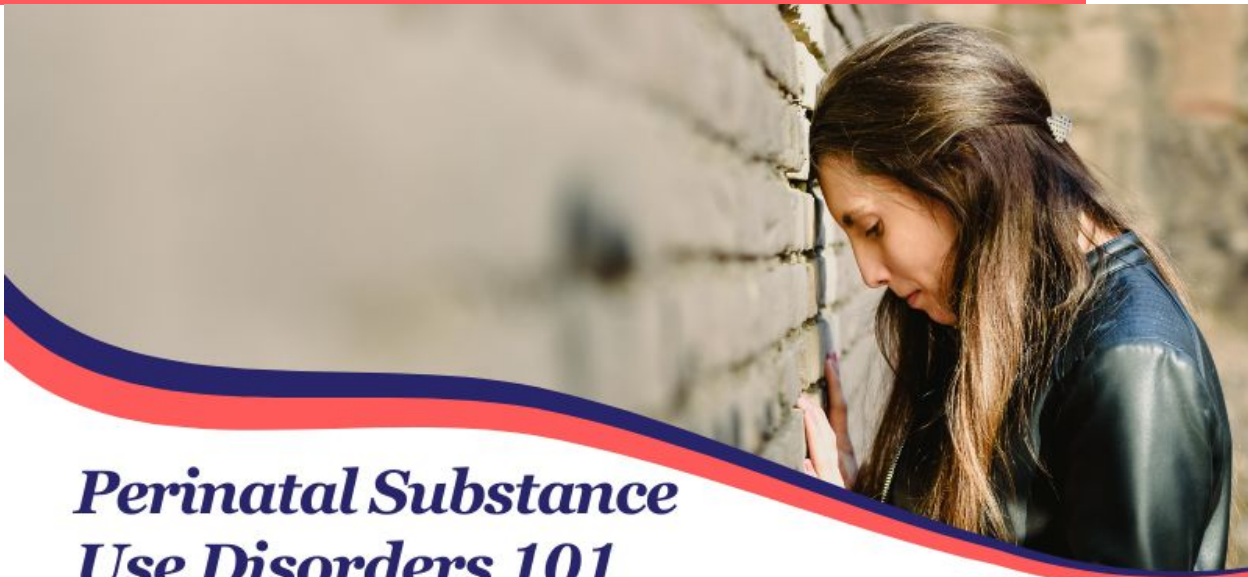
Learn More & Register:

<https://policycentermmh.org/event/perinatal-mental-health-101-9-04/>

Save the Date

Wednesday
October 1, 2025

10:30am-12:00pm
Pacific Time



Perinatal Substance Use Disorders 101

TRAINING



POSTPARTUM SUPPORT
INTERNATIONAL



COLORADO
Department of Public
Health & Environment



POLICY CENTER
FOR Maternal Mental Health™

Learn More & Register:

<https://policycentermmh.org/event/perinatal-substance-use-disorders-101-4/>

Now is the Time for MMH Systems Change



Learn More: PolicyCenterMMH.org

