

**TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:**

When Food Becomes an Enemy: Eating Disorders

**LENGTH OF LESSON:**

Two class periods

**GRADE LEVEL:**

9-12

**SUBJECT AREA:**

Human Body

**CREDIT:**

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**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will understand the following:

1. Understand the complexity of eating disorders and their possible causes.
2. Understand that there are identifiable symptoms of the most prevalent eating disorders.
3. Understand that help is available for prevention and treatment of eating disorders.

**MATERIALS:**

For this lesson, you will need:

Library resources and Internet sites that clearly define eating disorders, identify the most common symptoms, and discuss methods of prevention and treatment

Newsprint or construction paper, large enough for a collage or picture

Popular magazines and newspapers to use as source material

Markers or drawing pens

Student handout listing positive approaches to avoiding eating disorders (see Procedures)

Teachers should see New York Online Access to Health for a downloadable, 19-page comprehensive guide to eating disorders

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. **DAY 1** Begin by asking the class what they know about eating disorders, their causes, and anorexia and bulimia. How have they heard of these diseases? Students may mention actors, athletes, and other public figures who have been identified as having eating disorders. Take this opportunity to define anorexia and bulimia, and correct any misperceptions they have about eating disorders.

2. Next, have students research eating disorders and collect the following information:

- Define the most prevalent eating disorders: anorexia and bulimia. What are their symptoms?
- Address some causes of eating disorders, such as pressures from society and family and genetic predisposition.
- Present the medical complications that often result from eating disorders, and explain how these diseases can be life threatening.
- Describe prevention and early detection of eating disorders.
- Explain different methods of treating eating disorders.

3. **DAY 2** Ask the class to brainstorm reasons that eating disorders are so prevalent in our society. For example, food is abundant, and certain body shapes are valued. What messages do the media give about food and physical beauty?

4. Divide the class into small groups and have them peruse magazines and newspapers to find examples of conflicting messages about eating and body image. For example, they may find ads for high-calorie foods or an “all you can eat” restaurant, as well as fashion articles with overly thin models. Encourage them to think of their own examples, such as

the preponderance of exercise programs on cable television as well as gourmet-cooking channels. They may cite ads for cosmetic surgery that claim people can be made to look perfect.

5. After they have compiled 5 to 10 powerful mixed messages, have each group create a “Mixed Messages” poster that shows the volume of messages we receive in our daily lives about food and appearances. They could make a collage by cutting out materials from newspapers or magazines or create an original drawing in which they juxtapose these mixed messages. Display finished products for the class.

6. Conclude by asking students how they can help themselves to counteract the effect of these mixed messages and avoid conditions that trigger eating disorders. Examples of positive behaviors may include these:

- Recognizing the contradictory emphases that are constantly before them in our society
- Appreciating themselves and others for traits and talents that are not wrapped up in physical appearance or image
- Practicing good nutritional habits
- Trying to achieve a balance in their lives so they do not place disproportionate importance on any one thing
- Taking part in activities that they enjoy and that help boost their confidence and self-image
- Adopting habits that alleviate stress and anxiety in their lives
- Relying on the help of a network of nurturing individuals such as family, friends, and professionals at school when they are faced with personal problems they feel are too large to handle on their own
- Seeking professional help immediately if they suspect they or their friends are at risk for developing an eating disorder

### **ADAPTATIONS:**

Adaptation for younger students

Define *eating disorder* for your class and ask them to brainstorm reasons for eating disorders. Explain that anorexia is self-inflicted starvation and that bulimia is dangerous overeating and purging. Talk about the dangers of these diseases. Next, ask students to discuss ways that television reinforces our ideas about food, ideal body images, and positive behaviors. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group a different “message” they might see on television: (1) the importance of positive behavior

(healthful food and exercise); (2) the lure of high-calorie, fatty foods; and (3) the idea that the ideal body shape is extremely thin. Have each group create a three-minute skit—such as a mock commercial or television program—to present to the class.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Researchers cite environment, biochemistry, and genetics among possible causes of eating disorders. Analyze what this means in terms of treatment of the disease.
2. Eating disorders are diseases still found predominantly among young women, yet studies show more and more young men are exhibiting symptoms. What are some possible reasons for this trend?
3. Closely examine your daily life and those factors that influence your eating habits. Which factors encourage positive eating habits and which contribute to less healthy eating habits? Explain your answers.
4. Imagine you have noticed that a good friend is showing signs of a possible eating disorder. Describe some of the indicators you might witness. How would you seek help for him or her? What do you think would be the most difficult obstacles in trying to help?
5. There is evidence that eating disorders existed in ancient Greek, Roman, and medieval societies. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
6. Stress and anxiety contribute to eating disorders, but they do not cause them. Evaluate the level of stress and anxiety in your life. What experiences or pressures cause these feelings? How do you handle such pressures? Discuss ways in which you might alleviate some of the stress and anxiety.

### **EVALUATION:**

To assess your students' work in this lesson, use this simple rubric:

- Student participated in class discussion (5 points)
- Student contributed to group work (5 points)
- The “Mixed Messages” presentation was thorough, thoughtful, creative, and showed an understanding of eating disorders (10 points)

Total possible points: 20

### **EXTENSION:**

### **Public Service Pamphlet (trifold with title cover)**

Based on the information learned and discussed in class, ask students to prepare a trifold public service pamphlet for high school students to raise awareness of eating disorders. Divide students into small groups of four or five. Ask each group to create its own pamphlet following this format: Take a piece of 8.5" × 11" paper and fold it into three parts, horizontally. On the cover, ask students to create a title for their publication. The covers should have a positive tone, mentioning eating disorders but focusing on prevention of the disease. The inside of the pamphlet should open into three columns. In each column, have students include information under the following headings:

- *What's an eating disorder?* This column should include brief definitions or descriptions of eating disorders, medical complications that result from eating disorders, and perhaps statistics to show the prevalence of the disease and the groups most affected.
  - *What can you do to avoid an eating disorder?* List the positive behaviors and attitudes to avoid experiences that trigger eating disorders.
  - *Where can you get help?* List the people and services available to students in their school and community who can help in the treatment of eating disorders.
- Have students display their pamphlets for everyone to read. You may have the class vote on the most effective pamphlet, and then make copies of it for other classes or for the guidance office.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

#### **Everything You Need to Know About Eating Disorders: Anorexia and Bulimia**

Rachel Kubersky, Rosen, 1998.

Using real-life examples this book describes and explains anorexia and bulimia. Also included are the symptoms of each condition and ways to prevent and treat them.

#### **Stick Figure: A Diary of My Former Self**

Lori Gottlieb, Simon and Schuster, 2000.

A former Hollywood executive has rewritten the diary she wrote as an eleven-year-old -- the age she was when she nearly died from anorexia. The author's description of her life in school and at home that led her to stop eating and the treatment she received to help her start again will make you sad, make you mad, and make you laugh out loud. It's a book that's very, very real.

### **WEB LINKS:**

#### **The Center for Eating Disorders**

This site provides definitions, resources and the opportunity to ask questions related to

eating disorders.

<http://www.eatingdisorder.org/>

**ANRED: Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders**

This is a nonprofit organization that provides information about anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, compulsive exercising, and other less well-known food and weight disorders. Their material includes details about recovery and prevention.

<http://www.anred.com/>

**The American Dietetic Association**

This site offers numerous resources, some of which are available in Spanish, for good nutrition and the development of proper eating habits.

<http://www.eatright.org/>

**American Anorexia and Bulimia Association**

Dedicated to the prevention and treatment of eating disorders, this association offers information to professionals, family members and friends, as well as to those suffering from disordered eating, including males.

<http://www.aabainc.org/home.html>

**Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention**

This site offers a curriculum for high school girls and one for middle school students, plus a healthy body image curriculum for elementary students, media literacy information and more.

<http://www.edap.org/>

**National Eating Disorders Awareness Centre**

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC) is a Toronto-based, nonprofit organization, established in 1985 to provide information and resources on eating disorders and weight preoccupation.

<http://www.nedic.on.ca/>

**VOCABULARY:**

**ameliorate**

To make better or more tolerable.

**Context:**

Psychologists hope therapy will help ameliorate the anxiety that makes eating disorders worse.

**anorexia nervosa**

A serious disorder in eating behavior primarily of young women in their teens and early 20s that is characterized by a pathological fear of weight gain.

**Context:**

Anorexia nervosa leads to a physical state of starvation, malnourishment, and emaciation.

**bulimia**

A serious eating disorder that occurs chiefly in females, characterized by compulsive overeating usually followed by self-induced vomiting.

**Context:**

While anorexics become emaciated, those suffering from bulimia are often near normal weight.

**chronic**

There appears to be a connection between eating disorders and the body being in a chronic state of stress.

**Context:**

Marked by long duration or frequent recurrence.

**inhibit**

To prohibit from doing something; to hold in check.

**Context:**

In anorexics, the natural drive to eat is inhibited.

**obsession**

A persistent disturbing preoccupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling.

**Context:**

People with eating disorders are tormented by an obsession with food that they cannot control.

**predispose**

To make susceptible; to bring about susceptibility.

**Context:**

Some researchers believe there is a gene that predisposes people to eating disorders.

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS:****Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

Health

**Standard:**

Knows how to maintain and promote personal health.

**Benchmarks:**

Knows how personal behaviors relate to health and well-being and how these behaviors can be modified if necessary to promote achievement of health goals throughout life (e.g., following a personal nutrition plan to reduce the risk of disease, periodically self-assessing physical fitness).

**Benchmark:**

Understands the short-and long-term consequences of safe, risky, and harmful behaviors.

**Benchmark:**

Understands how personal health needs change during one's life cycle.

**Benchmark:**

Understands the impact of personal health behaviors on the functioning of body systems.

**Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

Health

**Standard:**

Knows the availability and effective use of health services, products, and information.

**Benchmarks:**

Knows situations that require professional health services in the areas of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation (e.g., persistent depression, prenatal and perinatal care, treatment or management of disease, alcohol- or drug-related problems, neglect and child abuse).

**Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

Behavioral studies

**Standard:**

Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.

**Benchmarks:**

Understands that cultural beliefs strongly influence the values and behavior of the people who grow up in the culture, often without their being fully aware of it, and that people have different responses to these influences.

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