

Health Politics with Dr. Mike Magee

Eating Disorders Among College Women Ⓜ

(NAPSA)—Here's vital information for anyone who is or knows a college student.

Eating disorders are rampant on college campuses across the country, especially among females. In fact, out of the nine in 10 college women who diet



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to control their weight, 35 percent become "pathologic dieters" and about one-quarter of these develop a clinical eating disorder. Con-

sidering the serious risks and consequences associated with eating disorders—many of which are life-threatening—these numbers are frightening.

Yet, we still don't completely understand eating disorders or what causes them. According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), eating disorders are illnesses with a biological basis modified and influenced by emotional and cultural factors. Since we suspect that major eating abnormalities often have their origins in childhood, the following two statistics become that much more profound—42 percent of 6 to 9 year olds "want to be thinner" and 81 percent of 10 year olds are "afraid of being fat."

Young girls generally aren't alone in their obsession with weight, since 85 percent of American families are "sometimes" or "often" on a diet. Nearly 15 percent of young women heading into college—where fitting in good nutrition is often inconvenient—are already burdened by substantially disordered eating attitudes and behaviors.

We need a continuum of strategies to address this problem and create healthier nutritional behaviors for college women. Parents, students and colleges all have a

role to play. Parents should begin early by examining their own prejudices and biases regarding food, nutrition, weight and body image. What behaviors are you modeling for your children? Parents need to manage and advance good nutrition as part of a healthy inheritance. Eating should be encouraged in response to hunger. Self-worth and self-esteem should be constantly reinforced, as should open communication. Finally, exploring nutrition during college campus visits and raising the topic of nutrition early and often places the issue on everyone's radar screen.

Students, particularly females, should recognize they are vulnerable and, through discussion with family and peers, come up with a realistic nutrition plan. Choose a college that will support your needs. Focus on balance, self-worth and reaching your full potential.

Colleges should understand they have a responsibility to their students. Recognize publicly the seriousness of eating disorders. Offer full nutritional counseling with registered dieticians who will personalize nutrition plans and integrate mental health support where appropriate.

Eating disorders are real, complex and devastating conditions that can have serious consequences for health, productivity and relationships. For treatment referrals or more information, contact NEDA at (800) 931-2237.

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