

RECOVERY SESSION:

DEFINING RECOVERY



DISCLAIMER

This resource is a living document and is open to change. It was created by students from within the Body Brave community and may not be fully representative of the spectrum of experience. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource or lived experiences that you don't see represented here, please email us at info@bodybrave.ca.

WHAT IS RECOVERY

Eating disorder recovery is different for each and every person. For some, it might mean that they never have another eating disorder thought again. For others, it means that although these thoughts are still there, they happen less frequently and they're able to acknowledge or control them through coping mechanisms/techniques, and the eating disorder no longer has the same impact on their daily life.

It's important to know that recovering from an eating disorder is rarely a linear process. Because an eating disorder can be a means of coping with or feeling in control of difficult emotions or situations, the idea of life without that coping tool can be very frightening, and you may feel conflicted about recovery. Nobody expects you to have a smooth path towards recovery – it's completely normal to meet some obstacles along the way.

In research, there is no agreed-upon definition of recovery, and this can be part of why the ED recovery process can feel so challenging and elusive. It is hard to work towards something that we don't understand. This is why defining and exploring recovery for ourselves and what it means to us as individuals is so important and so powerful.

**“Sometimes falling down is part of the process.
The uncomfortableness is where change happens.
Where we evolve.
Where we turn weakness into strength.”**

- Gina Susanna, @nourishandeat



THE FIVE STAGES OF RECOVERY

There are five Stages of Change that occur in the recovery process: Pre-Contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance.

The Precontemplation Stage

In the Precontemplation stage, a person is in denial that there is a problem. While others around them may have noticed some of the warning signs or symptoms, the person struggling has little or no awareness of the problems associated with their disordered eating. Instead, they may be focused on controlling their eating patterns. In this stage, you may think there is no problem, or believe that you are in control and could stop your behaviour if you wanted to.

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The Contemplation Stage

A person with an eating disorder in the Contemplation stage will have an awareness of their problems and may be considering the benefits of changing some of their behaviour. However, their attitude may also fluctuate between wanting to change and wanting to maintain their disordered eating habits. This can be difficult and confusing, both for the person with the eating disorder and for their loved ones.

The Preparation Stage

In this stage, the person with the eating disorder has decided they want to change their behaviour and is preparing to make these changes to work towards recovery. This can be a very stressful and an anxious time for the person with the disorder, as well as for others who are supporting them. In most cases, help from a doctor, clinician or eating disorder professional is either helpful or necessary to make safe and sustainable changes.

The Action Stage

A person with an eating disorder in the Action stage will be taking steps towards recovery and is focused on the recovery process. They require strong support and encouragement to get through this stage. A person can move backwards and forwards in their development during this stage and relapse can be common. The Action Stage can feel very fluid and non-linear, as is the nature of healing.

The Maintenance Stage

In the Maintenance stage, a person with an eating disorder will have changed their behaviour and may be focusing on maintaining their new, healthier habits. They are also learning to live without the eating disorder. This stage takes time and ongoing commitment, both from the person with the disorder and their support network. It is still possible for a person with an eating disorder to relapse at this stage. However, full recovery from relapses and recurrences is also entirely possible.



Tips for Recovery

- **Allow all foods.** Give yourself unconditional permission to enjoy all foods. Begin this process as an experiment of 1 food at a time, recommended to eat with a friend or loved one for support.
- **Work to ensure adequate nourishment from food.** Even on the days when the voices telling you to restrict are loud, ensure you are getting enough nutrition to maintain your health.
- **Recognize and honor your hunger.** Giving yourself adequate nutrition at regular intervals allows your body's metabolism to work the way it should! Restriction of food during the day has been shown to decrease metabolic rate.
- **Encourage satisfaction.** When you allow yourself to eat what you truly crave, you feel so much more content. Honor your taste preferences and notice how they play into satiety.
- **Engage your senses.** When we eat with our senses (sight, smell, touch, and taste!) the more connected we will be to our fullness and satisfaction thereby being less likely to overeat in a mindless way.
- **Practice body awareness.** Take a few moments a few times each day to check in with the physical sensations of your body. Think of them as guideposts. Allow for the awareness without judgment and simply notice what is going on in your physical body.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Recognize that you do not need to attach to every thought. If an unwanted thought arises, imagine letting it go.
- **Practice self-care.** Self-care is primary care. Sprinkle in opportunities to connect your body, mind, and It can be 5 minutes of deep breathing, journaling, drinking a cup of cocoa, calling a friend, anything that makes you happy. Know that self-care is also hard stuff too.
- **Cultivate joy in all areas of your life.** Find what lights you up and DO THAT!
- **Remember that your body is an instrument, not an ornament.** Repeat that often. Your body houses your soul and is the vehicle that allows you to move through the world.
- **Acknowledge emotions linked to eating.** Recognize when hunger is not biologically driven and work to “feed” yourself what your body, heart and mind truly need.

Let's set a goal

Choose one of the tips above and write a goal that you can work on this week. For example: When I notice myself pinching my arms, I will catch the behaviour and repeat a mindful affirmation five times. I will work to weigh myself once a day rather than X times a day. Etc.

Affirmations

Practice these affirmations to shift negative thoughts to neutral thoughts. You can memorize them and say them to yourself, put them in a note on your phone, write them on a piece of paper and carry them in your pocket, or put them on a sticky note next to your mirror. Choose the ones that resonate with you and reach for them in moments of stress, anxiety, or low body image.

These affirmations were partially sourced from the Intuitively You Affirmation Deck by Jenn Baswick at Intuitively You.

- I honor the space between where I am and where I want to be.
- Changing my body won't improve my body image, changing my mind will.
- I accept that my journey is unique to me.
- There is no such thing as a perfect recovery and that's okay.
- I only have one body, and it deserves care.
- The weight, shape, size of my body does not define my worth.
- I am practicing being comfortable in my own body.
- All bodies are good bodies, including mine.

Reflection Prompts

Choose a prompt. Set a timer on your phone for 3-5 minutes and reflect! You can write these down, or just think on them. Spend as much time on each question as you would like:

- Consider what recovery means to you. What would it mean for yourself, your relationships, your work, etc.?
- Describe what your life might feel like if you never pursue recovery.
- Describe what making peace with your body would feel like.
- Think of a time when you felt proud of yourself that wasn't related to your eating disorder. What was happening? How did you feel? Is that something you can do again?
- Think about a part of your body that you may struggle with. What would your 99-year-old self say to you about it?
- What is one thing you're looking forward to doing that recovery would allow you to do?
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Some of these prompts were sourced from Colleen Christensen at Colleen Christensen Nutrition

FURTHER LEARNING

Podcasts

[Food Psych with Christy Harrison](#) A podcast about intuitive eating, body image, and diet culture to help challenge restrictive dieting behaviors and learn some useful body-confidence strategies along the way.

[The Body Image Podcast with Corrine Dobbas, MS, RD](#) The Body Image Podcast is a podcast about body image and the many layers that go into making peace with our bodies. Like intuitive eating, self-compassion, mental health, self-care, body and size acceptance, embodiment, rejecting diet culture, and more.

[The Recovery Warrior Show](#) A podcast dedicated to boosting the emotional intelligence and resilience of people struggling with depression, anxiety and eating disorders.

Reading

[Body Respect: What Conventional Health Books Get Wrong, Leave Out, and Just Plain Fail to Understand about Weight](#)

[11 Do's and Dont's for Recovering From Eating Disorders](#)

[10 People Who Have Dealt with Eating Disorders Share What Recovery Looks Like for Them](#)