

. MISCONCEPTIONS HANDOUT

"Eating disorders are a choice."

- **Reality:** Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions influenced by a combination of genetic, biological, psychological, and environmental factors. They are not a lifestyle choice or phase.
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2. "Only teenage girls get eating disorders."

- **Reality:** While teenage girls are a vulnerable group, eating disorders affect people of all genders, ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example:
 - Men account for about 25% of cases of anorexia and bulimia and 36% of binge eating disorder cases.
 - Older adults and children can also develop eating disorders.
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3. "You can tell if someone has an eating disorder by looking at them."

- **Reality:** Eating disorders come in all body sizes. Someone with a larger body can have anorexia, just as someone with a smaller body can have binge eating disorder. Weight or appearance is not a reliable indicator of an eating disorder's severity.
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4. "Eating disorders are only about food and weight."

- **Reality:** While eating and weight concerns are symptoms, eating disorders are often rooted in deeper emotional issues such as:
 - Low self-esteem
 - Perfectionism
 - Trauma
 - A need for control Food behaviours are often a way to cope with or express these underlying issues.
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5. "If someone starts eating normally, they're cured."

- **Reality:** Recovery involves more than just eating "normally." It includes addressing the psychological and emotional factors underlying the disorder. Relapse is also common and does not mean failure.
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6. "People with eating disorders just want attention."

- **Reality:** Eating disorders are not a bid for attention. They are complex and often occur in private. Many people with eating disorders go to great lengths to hide their behaviours out of shame or fear of judgment.
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7. "Diets and exercise can't lead to eating disorders."

- **Reality:** Restrictive diets and compulsive exercise can increase the risk of developing an eating disorder, especially in individuals who are genetically predisposed or have perfectionistic traits.
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8. "Binge eating disorder is just overeating."

- **Reality:** Binge eating disorder (BED) is not the same as occasionally overeating. BED involves recurring episodes of eating large quantities of food, a loss of control during the episodes, and significant emotional distress afterward.
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9. "Parents are to blame for their child's eating disorder."

- **Reality:** While family dynamics can sometimes contribute, eating disorders are complex and multifactorial. Blaming parents oversimplifies the issue and is rarely accurate or helpful.
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10. "Only people with anorexia need treatment."

- **Reality:** All eating disorders, including bulimia, binge eating disorder, ARFID, and others, can have severe physical and mental health consequences and require treatment.
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11. "You can recover on your own if you just try harder."

- **Reality:** Recovery usually requires professional help, including therapy, medical monitoring, and sometimes nutritional counselling. Eating disorders are not something people can "snap out of."
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12. "Orthorexia isn't serious because it's about healthy eating."

- **Reality:** Orthorexia, an obsession with "clean" or "healthy" eating, can lead to severe malnutrition, social isolation, and psychological distress. It's not officially recognized in the DSM but is increasingly acknowledged by professionals.