

The Physician's Role in Eating Disorders Prevention

Primary Prevention

Reducing or eliminating the problem by understanding and addressing causes and risk factors.

Physicians are doing primary prevention whether they know it or not when they:

- Educate patients about nutrition
- Play role of health educator
- Encourage healthy physical activity
- Promote positive body image
- Help families to communicate effectively, have healthy relationships, and build self-esteem
- Guide parents and children through the challenges of growth and individuation

Secondary Prevention

Identifying the problem early, before it becomes severe. Physicians play an important role by:

- Noticing changes in physical parameters such as growth, weight, vital signs
- Sharing concerns and providing initial counseling
- Educating patients about the importance of adequate nutrition and health habits
- Consulting to schools, athletic organizations, and other influential groups

Tertiary Prevention

Developing strategies to keep the problem from getting worse. Again, physicians are unique in their ability to:

- Refer for appropriate therapy by knowing the resources in their area
- Break the denial by giving an historic perspective of their observations of the patient's condition and potential consequences of the eating disorder
- Educate patients about the positive benefits of treatment
- Monitor medical status and keep patients stable while treatment proceeds
- Set a positive example of needing others by collaborating and communicating with mental health professionals
- Advocate for appropriate care when third party payers deny it

Recommended Reading

Compiled by Margo Maine, PhD

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