

Eating Disorders: The Journey to Recovery

The journey to recovery from an eating disorder is **different for everyone**. There is currently no set definition of what recovery is, but it generally involves challenging and overcoming the beliefs and behaviours associated with the illness, and developing healthier ways of eating, thinking, and behaving.

"Being recovered is when the person can accept his or her natural body size and shape and no longer has a self-destructive or unnatural relationship with food or exercise. When you are recovered, food and weight take a proper perspective in your life and what you weigh is not more important than who you are, in fact, actual numbers are of little or no importance at all. When recovered, you will not compromise your health or betray your soul to look a certain way, wear a certain size or reach a certain number on a scale. When you are recovered, you do not use eating disorder behaviours to deal with, distract from, or cope with other problems."

By Carolyn Costin
(In her book "8 Keys to Recovery From an Eating Disorder")

There is no set time for how long recovery will take. The length of recovery will depend on a number of factors, including the treatment and support received. Evidence suggests that the sooner you start treatment for an eating disorder, the better the outcomes will be, and potentially the shorter the recovery process will take (Byrne & Rosen, 2014).

Sometimes it may feel that recovery is slow or even impossible. However, with the appropriate treatment and support, and a high level of personal commitment, recovery from an eating disorder is definitely possible.

The moment you decide you want freedom more than you want your disorder; recovery becomes possible.

A new chapter

Letting go of an eating disorder often triggers a great deal of uncertainty and fear. Recovery will open a new chapter in your life, one in which you can hopefully find joy and peace and look forward to life, whether that means finishing school, going to university, embarking on a new career, travelling, fostering a new positive relationship, or becoming a parent.

People who have recovered from an eating disorder often speak about how much stronger their relationships with their friends, family and carers became after working through the treatment together. Often people feel that they have a much better understanding of themselves and have grown as a person through their recovery journey.

Some women claim their experience of an eating disorder as part of their story, and not something that must be overcome and forgotten.

"Rather than forgetting, they wanted to remember. Rather than being gone, the experience shaped their self-understanding. Rather than returning to some pre-morbid state defined as recovery, these women honoured their experience as a journey of self-transformation that provided them with opportunity for growth and rich connection to their values."

"I like that I've overcome something, I've fought something that had the capacity to take me down or take my life and I said no, and I fought for life. So, it's made me value what life is a lot more...I didn't realise that it would be something that will be with me, my life, it's part of my story, it's part of what makes me up."

- Jane (Conti, 2016)

Byrne, P., & Rosen, A. (2014). *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Conti, J. E. (2016). Recovering Identity from Anorexia Nervosa: Women's Constructions of Their Experiences of Recovery from Anorexia Nervosa Over 10 Years. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 31(1), 1-23. doi: 10.1080/10720537.2016.1251366

Costin, C., Schubert Grabb, G., & Rothschild, B. (2011). *8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder: Effective Strategies from Therapeutic Practice and Personal Experience*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.