

Eating Disorders and COVID-19: What Individuals and Families/Caregivers Need to Know

The National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders (NCEED) partnered with researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Leiden University Medical Center to understand how COVID-19 is affecting individuals with eating disorders. This large-scale, international study (COVID-ED) of over 1,000 individuals was the first of its kind, and the full results can be read [here](#). As an overview of the early findings from the United States, NCEED has developed the following recommendations if you or your loved one has an eating disorder:

- **Keep a close eye on any changes in symptoms.** Some participants in the COVID-ED study reported that since the start of COVID-19, they have experienced increases in dietary restriction, binge eating, and overexercise, as well as fears about being able to find foods that fit in their meal plan. These results suggest that a worsening of your or your loved one's eating disorder might have been triggered by COVID-19 and public health measures to limit the spread of the virus such as physical distancing.
- **Look for ways to help make the home environment a safe place for eating disorder recovery.** Participants in the COVID-ED study reported that their eating disorder had gotten worse due to a lack of structure in daily routines and at mealtimes, a lack of social support, and spending increased amounts of time in an environment that was triggering/unsupportive. So if you or your loved one has an eating disorder, you might want to consider:
 - Having regular meal and snack times throughout the day
 - Asking a family member or friend to provide support during meals (either face to face or via video calls)
 - Scheduling time for connection with loved ones whether at home or via video calls
- **Stay connected with your treatment team if you have one, and reach out for help if you are not currently in treatment.** Results from the COVID-ED study indicated that those who stayed connected to treatment providers via video/phone calls reported less negative impact of COVID-19 on their eating disorder. Even people who were in recovery reported that they were concerned about symptoms returning or full blown relapse. Unfortunately, many participants were not in any kind of eating disorder treatment even though they were experiencing symptoms. If you are not currently getting care for your eating disorder, please access this [free treatment finder](#) or call the [National Eating Disorder Association \(NEDA\) helpline](#). If you are concerned about relapse, reach out to your provider—booster sessions can help get your recovery back on track.
- **Find the bright spots when you can.** Participants in the COVID-ED study identified several positives during COVID-19 including: more family meals, more time for spiritual/meditative practices, and increased motivation to recover. If you or your loved one has an eating disorder, it may be important find the positives during this time and work on ways to incorporate those positives on a regular basis.
- Looking for more information on how to care for yourself or a loved one with an eating disorder during COVID-19?
 - Visit [NCEED's COVID-19 Resource Library](#) for more information.
 - [NEDA](#) and [The Alliance for Eating Disorders](#) are also offering free and low-cost virtual support.