

## Signs, Myths, and Misconceptions about Eating Disorders, Q&A with ED Expert and Researcher Stuart Murray, DClInPsych, PhD



**National Eating Disorders Awareness Week** takes place during the week of February 21-27, 2022 to educate the public about the realities of eating disorders (ED). ED affects people of all genders, ages, races/ethnicities, body weights, and socioeconomic statuses. By understanding the signs, myths, and misconceptions about ED, we aim to provide support and resources to individuals and families affected by ED.

**Stuart Murray, DClInPsych, PhD**, Della Martin Associate Professor of Psychiatry and the Behavioral Sciences and Director of Eating Disorders Program and Translational Research in Eating Disorders Laboratory in the Department of Psychiatry and the Behavioral Sciences at Keck School of Medicine of USC, shares his knowledge and insights about ED.



**Stuart Murray,  
DClInPsych, PhD**

### What are some of the signs and symptoms?

Mental health screening is especially important for those with eating disorder (ED) symptoms. The delay between the development of ED symptoms and the detection of symptoms by health providers can be several years.

Some symptoms and signs to look out for include:

- Rapid changes in weight
- Rigid rules around food intake
- Increased body checking and food label checking
- Eating in secret
- Bathroom visits immediately after eating
- Periods of frenzied eating without control
- Increasing valuation of shape and weight



### What are some of the myths and misconceptions?

A harmful myth relating to ED is that these are fads or phases that some people go through and are not serious disorders. ED are among the most lethal of all psychiatric disorders and have mortality rates comparable to some forms of cancer.

### What are some of the current research findings?

Research continues to find that early screening and parental involvement in a child's or transitional age youth's eating disorder treatment can increase chances of recovery. Some forms of treatment, like family-based treatment, involve close monitoring until regular eating habits are established.

Dr. Murray's program of [research](#) utilizes behavioral, psychophysiological, and neuroimaging methods to elucidate the mechanisms that underpin eating disorder psychopathology and develop precision treatment approaches to optimize patient outcomes.

### Why is it important to screen students?

ED most commonly develops in the mid-to-late-adolescence, which coincides with the time many young people transition to college. Arrival at college is also typically the first time young people have been without their family or caregivers in supporting themselves, which can intensify difficulties around eating.

Individuals suffering from an eating disorder that are untreated on both a physical and emotional level could develop potentially fatal conditions, including malnutrition, heart problems, and more.

### Additional Information and Resources

There are several resources available to get involved or help and support those with ED.

- Visit <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/get-involved/nedaweek> for details, messaging, and events to support National Eating Disorders Awareness Week
- Visit Academy of Eating Disorders (AED) <http://www.aedweb.org>
- Learn about [Body Acceptance](#), including body positivity, body neutrality, and body liberation
- Support clinical research through funding and grants, including ED research in the [Department of Psychiatry and the Behavioral Sciences](#) at Keck School of Medicine of USC
- Join a [support group](#)