The Impact of COVID-19 on Those Affected by Eating Disorders

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Objectives

1. Discuss the challenges experienced by those affected by eating disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Discuss the prevalence rate of eating disorders in Canada
3. Identify the main types of eating disorders
4. Analyze trends in the literature concerning eating disorders and COVID-19
5. Discuss information provided by agencies internationally concerning their delivery of services during COVID-19
6. Discuss the importance of using self-screening tools, self-help strategies and online resources during the pandemic
Goal of Presentation:
To provide information regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those affected by eating disorders
Prevalence of Eating Disorders

In 2016, an estimated 725,800 to 1,088,700 Canadians met diagnostic criteria of an eating disorder.

(The National Initiative for Eating Disorders, 2020)
Common Types of Eating Disorders

The Most Prevalent Eating Disorders:
- Anorexia Nervosa
- Bulimia Nervosa
- Binge Eating Disorders

Other Types of Eating Disorders:
- Avoidant and Restrictive Food Intake Disorder
- Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder
- Unspecified Feeding or Eating Disorder

(The National Eating Disorder Information Centre, 2020)
Main Themes:
Current Literature

1. How the Pandemic is Shaping the Reality of Those Affected by Eating Disorders
2. Transition to TeleMedicine
3. Influence of Social Media
1. How the Pandemic is Shaping the Reality of Eating Disorders

- Disruption of daily routines
- Environments non-conducive to their ability to recover or stay in remission
- A general change to their overall mental health

(Halter et al., 2019; Keel et al., 2020; Rodgers et al., 2020; Schlegl et al., 2020; Termorshuizen et al., 2020)
2. The Transition to Telemedicine

● Strengths:
  ○ Public anxiety
  ○ Fear of contracting the virus in public areas

● Challenges:
  ○ Technical issues/lack of knowledge about technology
  ○ Privacy concerns
  ○ Physical assessment

(Barney et al., 2020; Carlson & Goldstein, 2020; Davis et al., 2020; Matheson et al., 2020; Waller et al., 2020)
3. The Influence of **Social Media**

- More time to spend on social media
- Increase in exposure to unhealthy fitness programs, unsustainable fad diets, unrealistic body image expectations and fatism culture
- Easy access to resources that require little to no expertise

(Fernández-Aranda et al., 2020; Phillipou et al., 2020; Rodgers et al., 2020; Santarrossa & Woodruff, 2017; Weissman et al., 2020)
Reflection:
What are some other ways that you think the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of individuals and families experiencing an eating disorder?
Agencies Around The World

- Ophelia’s Place & The Every Body is Beautiful Project
  Liverpool, NY

- Sheena’s Place
  Toronto, ON

- Community-Based Services for Body Image and Eating Disorders
  Israel

(M. Golan, personal communication, November 1, 2020; H. Lowrey, personal communication, November 2, 2020; K. Johnston, personal communication, November 9, 2020)
Self-Screening Tool: “EAT-26”

This online self-screening tool helps individuals identify if they are at risk or are experiencing an eating disorder.

Provides individuals with a survey that evaluates their eating and behavior patterns.

Recommends professional help if necessary.

(Garner et al., 1982)
Self-screening tool available through link below:
Coping Strategies

- Creative journaling
- Free online yoga
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- 5,4,3,2,1 grounding exercises
- Breathing techniques

- Self-help apps (i.e., Headspace)
- Mechanical eating
- Going outside
- Disconnect from social media
- Motivational blogs
- Health anxiety workbook

Tips for Family Members

1) Avoid focusing directly on food or eating habits
2) Be mindful of your own beliefs surrounding food and body image
3) Never force them to eat or trick them into eating
4) Avoid reacting to their comments about their own body image or body goals
5) Respect their privacy while also encouraging help-seeking
6) Initiate family counselling
7) Set boundaries and make sure to support yourself

(CMHA, 2020)
Additional Resources for Anyone Struggling with Disordered Eating

- “Resources”
  https://nedic.ca/resources/

- “Eating Disorders and Coronavirus”
  https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/coronavirus

- “Covid-19 Care Series”
  https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwKlJv1-9RYE4eDXHuCRYt7iNFiFX5qIV

- “Eating Disorders, Self Regulation and Mentalization”
  https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT0443363
Additional Resources for Anyone Struggling with Disordered Eating

- “Eating disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine: an overview of risks and recommendations for treatment and early intervention”

- “Access to evidence-based care for eating disorders during the COVID-19 crisis”

- “Canadian Eating Disorders Strategy”
  https://nedic.ca/media/uploaded/Canadian_Eating_Disorders_Strategy_2019-2029__dps__ENG.pdf
Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador

- Wide variety of services
- Information and education resources
- HOPE program
- Scholarships and awards
- Educated and dedicated staff

Coping Throughout the Pandemic:
- Transition to online services
- Online fundraising
- Adjusting to new technology (ie: Zoom)

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Summary of Main Points...

- Unique challenges faced by those affected by eating disorders
- Self-help techniques and online screening tools
- Collaboration among organizations and staff
- Ever-changing information and research
THANKS!

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