

Surviving the holidays if you have an eating disorder

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"Cookies are made of butter
and love."

- Norwegian Proverb

The Dilemma

Holidays should be a time of year to look forward to but are stressful for people with eating disorder.

- Have a game plan
- Keep your sense of humor
- Make yourself useful
- Make time for yourself
- Look on the bright side



For people who are already overweight, the holiday weight news is worse.

- Although the *average* gain is only one pound, people who are already overweight tend to gain a lot more.
- Overweight people may be more likely to gain five pounds or more during the holidays.
- Amount of exercise during holidays did not predict amount of weight gain.

Mechanism of change

- You need an approach (or framework) to understand these symptoms that is understandable and consistent with belief systems
- Patients need to affectively be engaged in applying this framework
- Reality testing in the problematic situations

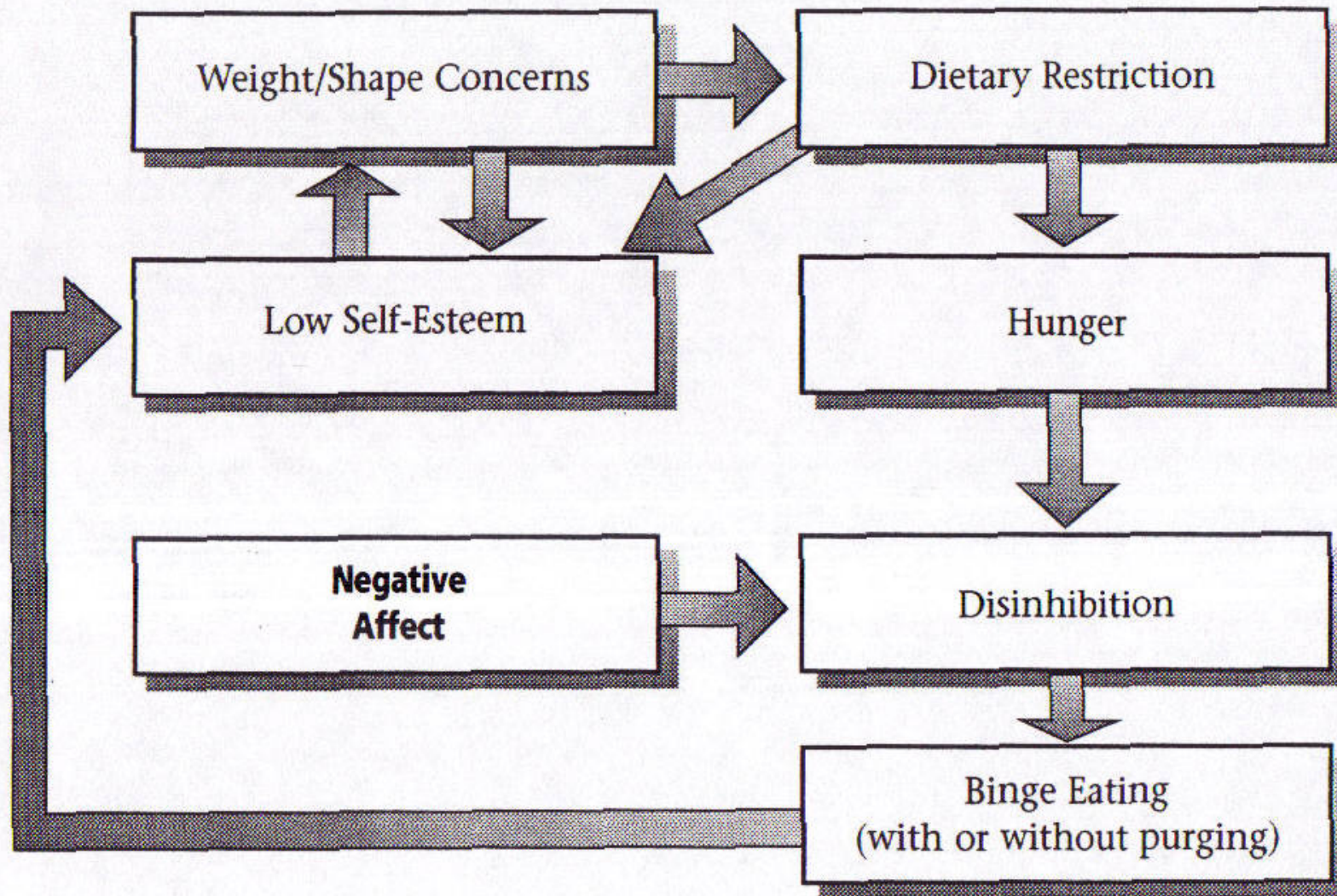


Figure 2.1.

**Cognitive-Behavioral Model of
Bulimia Nervosa and Binge-Eating Disorder**

Eat regularly and in some kind of reasonable pattern

- Avoid “preparing for the last supper.”
- Don’t skip meals and starve in an attempt to make up for what you recently ate or are about to eat.
- Keep a regular and moderate pattern



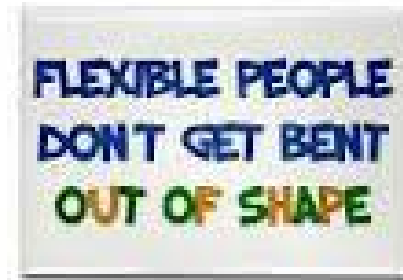
Avoid “overstressing” and “overbooking” yourself

- A lower sense of stress can decrease the perceived need to turn to eating-disordered behaviors or other unhelpful coping strategies.
- Cut down on unnecessary events and obligations and leave time for relaxation, contemplation, reflection, spiritual renewal, simple service, and enjoying the small yet most important things in life.
- This will help you experience and enjoy a sense of gratitude and peace.



Be flexible

- Work on being flexible in your thoughts.
- Learn to be flexible when setting guidelines for yourself and expectations of yourself and others.
- Strive to be flexible in what you can eat during the holidays.
- Take a holiday from self-imposed criticism, rigidity, and perfectionism.



Take advantage of support groups

- Stay active in your support group, or join one if you are not currently involved.
- Many support groups can be helpful: 12-step groups, co-dependency groups, eating disorder therapy groups, book clubs, neighborhood game groups, and religious- or spiritually oriented groups are examples of groups that may give real support.
- Isolation and withdrawal from positive support are not the way to get through trying times.



Have a vision



- Write down your vision of where you would like your mind and heart to be during this holiday time with loved ones.
- Take time, several times per day, to find a quiet place to get in tune with your vision, to remember, to nurture, and to center yourself in the thoughts, feelings, and actions that match your vision for yourself.



Plan ahead

Discuss your anticipation of the holidays with your therapist, physician, dietitian, or other members of your treatment team so that they can help you predict, prepare for, and get through any uncomfortable family interactions without self-destructive coping attempts.



Have a game plan

- Have a well-thought-out game plan before you go home or invite others into your home.
- Know “where the exits are,” where your support people are, and how you’ll recognize when it’s time to make a quick exit and get connected with needed support.



Set goals for time with loved ones

- Focus your personal goals for your time with loved ones during the holidays. Make them about “doing something” rather than about trying to prevent something.
- It’s fine to have food goals, but make sure you add personal, emotional, spiritual, and relationship goals as well.



Share your struggle with a family member who will be present

- Consider choosing one loved one to be your “reality check” with food, to either help fix a plate for you or to give you sound feedback on the food portion sizes you make for yourself.
- Reach out rather than isolate!

Have an emergency phone number

- Think of someone to call if you are struggling with addictive behaviors, or with negative thoughts or difficult emotions.
- Alert them ahead of time; let them know of your concerns, needs, and the possibility of you calling them for emotional support.



Have some fun!

- Talk with loved ones about important issues: decisions, victories, challenges, fears, concerns, dreams, goals, special moments, spirituality, relationships and your feelings about them.
- Allow important themes to be present. Allow yourself to have fun rather than rigidly focusing on food or body concerns.

Diet, exercise and behavior therapy: application to everyday life

- Goals (i.e., increasing positive goal directed activity and maintain intake) are accomplished.
- Behavior therapy's principal methodology is an individual functional analysis (through self-monitoring) that seeks to determine the antecedents and consequences of eating, exercise, and thinking habits.
- This model views behavior as a series of links in a chain that can be broken to change target behaviors. The multiple techniques used to modify unhealthy habits include self-monitoring, specific goal-setting, and stimulus control.

“Health” Model of Physical Activity

Regular physical exercise contributes to the maintenance of health and disease prevention. Optimal levels of physical exercise has favorable effects on **physical and mental well-being** of adults, adolescents and children.

(US Dept. of HHS, 2010)

- Positive impact on depression and anxiety, compares favorably to psychopharmacology for moderate depression (Carek, Laibstain & Carr, 2011)
- Associated with improved health, life satisfaction, cognitive improvements, prevention of bone disease (AMA, 2010)



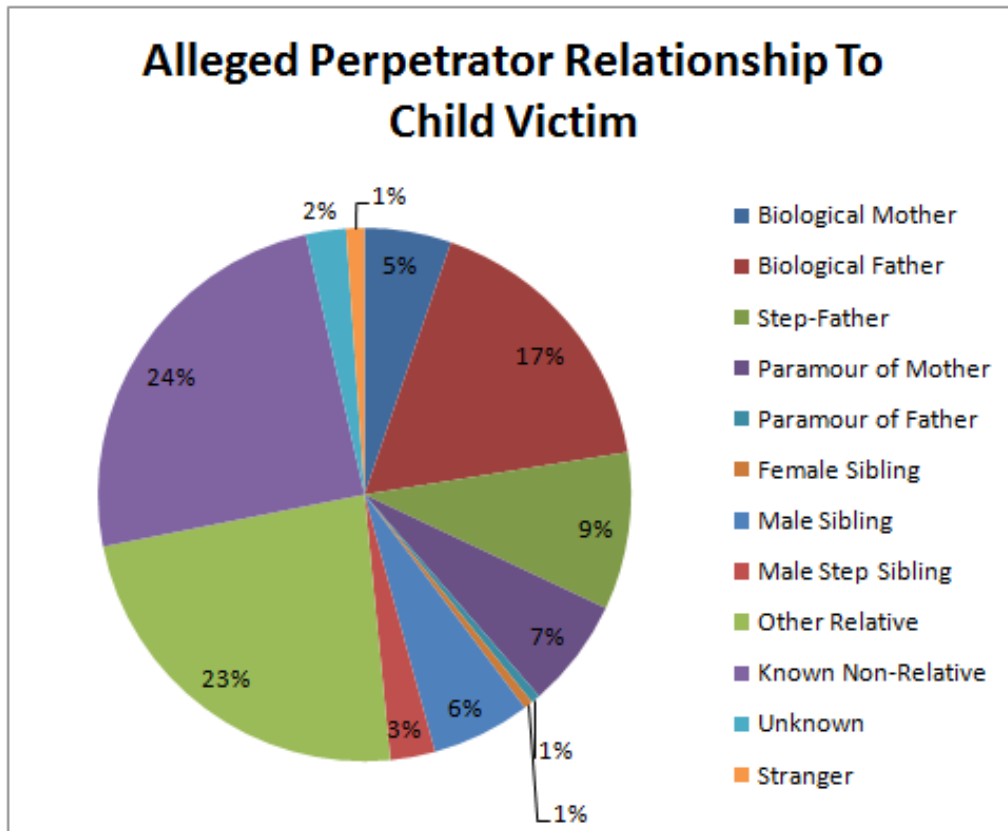
Grief and Loss

Acknowledge holiday triggering grief and loss.

- First holiday without loved one
- Loss of a child
- Single for the first time at the holidays



Abuse issues



- If past trauma is an issue for you, it is important to be mindful of possible perpetrators you might come in contact with during the holidays that could trigger your symptoms.

Travel and Holiday

Holiday at the beach can bring on additional stress and restrictive eating prior to and during holiday season.



Worry more about the size of your heart than the size of your hips!

It is the holiday season, a great time to reflect, enjoy relationships with loved ones, and most importantly, a time to feel gratitude for blessings received and to give back through loving service to others.

enjoy





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