

Guide to self caring with an eating disorder



Our minds distort
our mirrors!

Taking Action On Eating Disorders

EATING DISORDER
AWARENESS WEEK

27 FEB - 5 MAR



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As a project worker from AMH everyBODY eating disorder support service, one of the things that I've heard regularly from clients is the difficulty of feeling guilty. Guilty for being less productive, more emotional, moving less, having less energy, being more hungry, and even guilt for feeling guilty "other people have it worse off than I do, so I shouldn't feel guilty."

It's human for us all to have difficulties at times and we don't need comparison in our tougher days. We are all wonderfully unique and experience life in many different ways. Recovery is a journey of learning how to ride the wave of the ups and the downs.

Your feelings are always valid, and you are always deserving and worthy of support. We can have our own struggles, and still have empathy for other people, one does not negate the other. Allow yourself to be human and know that your ability to feel all of your emotions only helps you to know and understand others better too. When we break the silence and seek support we can make sense of any difficult experiences and develop tools that will help us manage and cope better, and work towards a brighter future knowing recovery is possible for everyBODY.

This guide will provide some simple tips for self-care and hopefully enable you to start to offer yourself or a loved one some kindness and compassion at a time when we need it most.

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Adjust your expectations – Is it really fair to expect yourself to do the same work you would have when you have additional caring responsibilities, change of environment or circumstance not to mention any additional worries or concerns. Remember you aren't super human and it's ok not to be able to do it all. Delegate and share responsibilities if you need to. You are not selfish for needing extra support. Focus on your basic human needs.

Concentrate on the here and now – focus your mind on what we can control day by day. This could be things like how much sleep you get, who you talk to that day, making sure your body is nourished, taking time to do something that comforts you. Mindfulness Apps like Headspace can help with this.

·Stop comparing with others – Comparison is the thief of joy. We all have different strengths, we all have different abilities and our experiences of life will all be very different. You do what works and feels good for you. We are all unique and differences are not a bad thing.

Celebrate the small wins – this can be done by a practice of daily gratitude, taking account of 3 things you are grateful for or glad that happened that day. It doesn't matter how big or small. If you made it through the day, got out of bed, gave your body nourishment this can be enough, focus on what you can do.



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Sharing kind words – words of kindness can bring a sense of comfort and safety which are both basic human needs that can help to reduce stress and anxiety. It's important that when giving kind words to others that we will also remember to give them to ourselves too. Start to talk to yourself the way you would to someone you love. Create 3 affirmations for yourself you can read over on a regular basis, or even better stick a note on your mirror as a daily reminder –



"I am loved...I am strong....I am capable."

Take a self-compassion break – Take 5-10 minutes out to yourself and acknowledge how you are feeling. This can be done by putting your hand over heart and naming your emotion "I am feeling..." Take a minute to breathe and sit with this feeling, not judging it, simply letting it be and then offer yourself some compassion "May I be kind to myself" "May I accept myself as I am" "May I be patient with myself". By doing this you are giving yourself permission to feel and move through your emotions in a way that feels safe without becoming overwhelmed.



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Create a comfort list – Create a list of things you can do that will bring you comfort. It can be helpful to base these around your senses.

Sight – a folder of comforting photos or quotes on your phone

Sound – a comforting playlist, the sound of outdoors

Smell – fresh coffee, perfume, candles, essential oils

Touch – the grass in the garden on your feet, a warm blanket, give yourself a hug!

You can also include activities that can be comforting – colouring, reading, playing with pets, sorting out a drawer in the house, washing the car. Doing any of these things with the intent to bring yourself comfort is an act of self-care and kindness.



Focus on movement that feels good – At times we can hear unhelpful messages around working out. If this is creating pressure or guilt for you when you are engaging in exercise then this is not healthy. Bring it back to asking yourself what will feel good for my body today, some days that might mean resting, others it might mean getting outdoors for a walk, or it could mean having a dance about and enjoying some music. Exercise should be a celebration of what our body can do, never a punishment. Focus on what feels good.

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Our clients give us their top tips of what has helped them during recovery.

Setting a daily intention – my eating disorder thrives when I have no sense of purpose. When I can at least just focus on one thing that I can do, it can quiet my mind a bit. It could be organizing something in the house, calling or texting a friend or taking the dog for a walk. I try to make my intention realistic and achievable rather than a to do list that feels overwhelming. One thing at a time, one step at a time.



Mindful Movement – Allow time for movement in a way that feels good for the body, that has nothing to do with how you look, your size or what you weigh. Ask yourself what will feel supportive for my body right now. This could mean rest, stretching, or a little dance in the kitchen with your loved ones.

Implementing a flexible routine – Structure to your day can help to reduce anxiety. Routine can help with eating when it is scheduled into the day as a daily thing we do to keep ourselves well, just like making your bed, washing and brushing our teeth. Your mind and body need food no matter what so it is important that it is prioritised as part of our your routine. Focus on routine rather than rules. Rules come with pressure and obligation, and often negative emotion if one is broken, whereas routine is flexible and works for us dependent on the situation and environment we are in.

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Let it be – Sometimes we get so caught up in the doing, when what we actually need is to just let ourselves be. Be still. Be connected. Be allowed to feel what we have to feel. This can be scary, and it helps to have something to channel these feelings out into, whether that's a journal, or a trusted person.



Getting out of your head – one of the hardest parts of an eating disorder is that all consuming conflict in your head. It can disconnect you from everything, people and things you care about, and can quickly spiral into distorted thoughts and difficult feelings. One thing that helps with this for me is to use tools to help bring me back into the room, like grounding tools. Simple often works best like deep belly breathing techniques, a simple body scan to release tension from head to toe, or 5,4,3,2,1 – which draws your attention to your senses and the things around you.

Self-care starts with kindness – The way you speak to yourself, the simple ways you meet your needs, or even considering how you comfort yourself. Create a comfort list and get into the habit of regularly choosing off it. These could be simple things you sometimes do without thinking but doing something with the intention of choosing comfort has a much bigger impact. Things you might include on your comfort list could be – a favourite mug you have your cuppa in, a comforting spot you sit in the home, a collection of images on your phone you find comforting, or a comforting music playlist.

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Self-care means sometimes saying no – As a chronic people pleaser, I used to think the only way I could get self worth was from what I could give to others. Always saying yes and being at the beck and call, even if it meant that my own needs were suffering. I've learnt that saying no isn't selfish, it's self preservation. It's looking at my own energy resources and considering the impact saying yes might have on me. Saying no can be an act of self care, it allows me to prioritise my needs as well, and also saying no might mean I have more time to say yes to the things that I need for myself.



Self-care is being present with my dogs – My dogs have been such a help during recovery, caring for them has reminded me what it takes to care for myself. That I need the same attention, connection, patience, safety, and support from food that they do. They are a great grounding tool too, and even on the hardest days can bring a bit of laughter and joy with the simple and spontaneous way they see the world and play.



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Check in with yourself – I used to find it could be weeks or months before I had actually checked in with myself. Self-care for me is making time to ask MYSELF how I'm doing. I try to do this regularly through a journal prompt I learnt through AMH everyBODY "I think....I feel...I need." This is simple and doesn't take long, but it means I'm caring about myself enough to see what sort of day I've had.



Create a gratitude jar with family – This massively helped during recovery! Eating disorders can create a lot of conflict and it can be easy to get caught up in fighting the eating disorder and lose sight of the things we do love and appreciate about each other. In our gratitude jar we wrote simple things we appreciated about each other that week, it could be things about yourself too. On tough days the jar then also was a useful reminder of things that could be good.



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Dealing with Bad Body Image Days



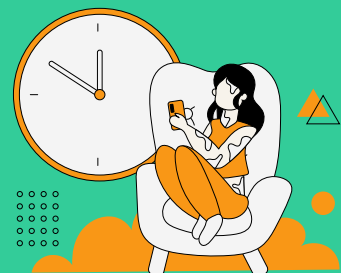
Be mindful of social media. Social media can encourage unhealthy comparison between ourselves and seemingly 'perfect' others. Be aware that not everything we see online reflects reality.

Challenge your inner critic. Practice reframing those negative thoughts. For example, if you think 'my tummy is too big', try coming up with a positive thought replacement such as, 'my tummy contains life sustaining organs that need space to function'



Practice body gratitude. What are you grateful for your body for? Think of all the things it does for you.

Body image fluctuates. Remember, how you feel is not permanent.



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Dealing with Bad Body Image Days

Write it down. Journaling can be a really healthy outlet for your emotions.



Be kind to yourself. Create a comfort list of simple things you can do to offer yourself a moment of kindness (music/activities). If you find kindness too difficult using neutral comments can also be helpful. "I have a body but it does not define my worth." "I am more than my appearance."

Be Kind

Talk to yourself like you would a friend. What advice would you give them if they told you they were struggling with the way they look?



Breathe. Mindfulness is a great way to connect with your body and develop a greater appreciation of it.

There are lots of free apps such as Headspace and Oak that can help with this.

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For Further Information and Support

If you think you have an eating disorder or are worried about your relationship with food, your body image, or your exercise habits please speak to your GP.

It's very important to access treatment as early as possible, as earlier treatment means a greater chance of fully recovering from your eating disorder.

Great organisations for more information.



Supporting Individuals and carers in Southern HSCT Area.

amh.org.uk



Supporting Individuals and carers in NI & UK.

beateatingdisorders.org.uk



Supporting Individuals and carers in NI.

eatingdisordersni.co.uk



Supporting carers in NI.

foughted.org



Supporting men and families in NI

thelaurencetrust.co.uk



Supporting Individuals and carers in NI.

amh.org.uk



Supporting Individuals and carers in NI.

linkscounselling.com

If you are in crisis please contact Lifeline on 0808 808 8000 or by Textphone on 18001 0808 808 8000, trained counsellors are available by phone 24/7.