

Recovering Joy

Expert Tips for Coping with an Eating
Disorder and Recovering a More Joyful
Life

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THE EATING DISORDER CENTER

Eating Disorder Therapy & Recovery Coaching

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THE EATING DISORDER CENTER

Eating Disorder Therapy & Recovery Coaching

Struggling with constant thoughts about food and your body is exhausting. You don't have to feel trapped anymore.

We are a premier therapy and coaching center, founded by Jennifer Rollin, MSW, LCSW-C, that specializes in the treatment of teens and adults with eating disorders, including anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder, ARFID, OSFED, compulsive exercise, and body image issues. We also have expertise in the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety and depression..

All of our therapists and coaches are health at every size informed, personally recovered, and believe that all foods fit.

We serve clients in person in Rockville, Maryland, as well as worldwide via Zoom (video platform).

To learn more, you can call us at 301-246-6856.

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Introduction

By: Jennifer Rollin, MSW, LCSW-C

Eating disorders make your whole world small.

They often bring 'short term' feelings of comfort, calm, and a (false) sense of control, —and they bring feeling increasingly isolated, unhappy, and anxious in the long-term. They are a joy-suck.

They may numb you out from feelings of sadness, but they also numb you out from experiencing joy, happiness, and contentment.

Introduction

Recovery opens up an amazing life that you never could have imagined!

Recovery gives you the gift of going to brunch with friends and laughing over French Toast without a second thought, going to a special event and being truly present in the moment, having life accomplishments that are no longer overshadowed by an eating disorder voice, —plus so many moments of true joy and connection.

Introduction

Recovering from an eating disorder is not just about letting go of it. It's also about recovering connection, a true sense of identity, passions—and experiencing joy again (or maybe for the first time!)

So, the next time your eating disorder whispers (or shouts), I hope you'll tell it to peace out while you turn towards recovering the amazing life you're meant to live.

Full recovery is possible and so worth it.

As always, I'm here rooting for you.

-Jennifer

Body Image

- Throw away your scale (Optional: smash it with a hammer)
- Dress to feel comfortable
- Buy clothing you love
- Recognize that your thinking about your body may be distorted
- Walk proud (opposite action)

Body Image

- Write body gratitude messages and place them in your clothes pockets to find throughout the day
- Host a clothing swap or donate your non-fitting clothes to a cause you care about
- Reduce/stop body-checking behaviors, since body-checking increases body image anxiety in the long-term
- Practice identifying and addressing your underlying emotions

Eating Enough

- Change the subject when other people talk about food, weight, or body size or shape
- Plan ahead for meals and snacks, and set reminders for yourself if needed
- Make a date to eat with someone
- Prepare a back-up plan for eating, to prioritize your recovery
- Write out or read coping statements

Urges to Restrict

- Think it through: will this choice strengthen my recovery or my eating disorder?
- Identify the emotion triggering the urge to restrict and address it
- Distract yourself during and after meals (e.g. games, videos, count # of blue objects or things that start with an "r" in the room while you eat)
- Remind yourself what you are recovering towards.

Urges to Binge

- Change the subject when others talk about food, weight, body size or shape
- Make a plan to ensure you eat enough meals and snacks throughout the day.
- Write out or read coping statements
- Identify the emotion(s) triggering the urge to binge and address it
- Call a loved one

Urges to Binge

- Opposite Action: write down in as much detail as possible what your eating disorder is telling you to do and then purposefully do the opposite
- Ask for the support you need
- Take a warm shower
- Journal your feelings and thoughts
- Practice the **PAUSE** skill: **P**ause to take a deep breath. **A**llow space—Leave the room, delay action. **U**se other coping strategies. **S**eparate the eating disorder thoughts. **E**nlist support

Urges to Purge

- Stay away from the bathroom
- Write down the short-term and long-term pros and cons of purging and not purging
- Urge surf: set timer for 20 minutes and do a neutral activity for 20 minutes (e.g. go for a drive, paint your nails, organize your room, call a friend) and then check back in with yourself to see if the intensity of your urge has gone down

Urges to Purge

- Write a letter to someone (even if you don't send it), or write in a journal
- Opposite Action: write down in as much detail as possible what your eating disorder is telling you to do and then purposefully do the opposite
- Listen to a self-compassion meditation

Self-Compassion

- Remember your value as a person has nothing to do with your body or your accomplishments.
- Give yourself permission to feel your feelings
- What would you tell someone you love and respect in your same situation?
- How would you treat a small child?
- When you feel most connected to your inner wise self, write a message to yourself. Read it later throughout your day.

Self-Esteem

- Start the morning with self-care
- Get creative (crafts, music, clothing, etc.)
- Reflect on something you did well today
- Learn something new (build mastery)
- Become an expert at something and talk about it
- Share your opinion

Self-Esteem

- Plan ways to use your existing strengths in small ways during the week
- Ask for help and support
- Create a "brag wall" that celebrates your accomplishments
- Create an ongoing list of things you admire about yourself and put it somewhere you can see everyday
- Surround yourself with people who treat you well

Ways to Nurture

- Listen to music you like
- Drink tea
- Light a candle
- Get a massage
- Shop for yourself
- Plan time for your favorite hobby
- Practice self-compassion

Ways to Nurture

- Make a coping skills box including fidgets, Floam or Aaron's crazy putty, essential oils, teabags, etc.
- Listen to a meditation through Insight Timer, Calm, or Headspace.
- Have an at-home spa day
- Take a day-trip somewhere fun
- Write a list of everything that you are grateful for.

Ways to Connect

- Volunteer
- Go someplace where you can be with people even if you do not want to talk
- Join in a group game
- Make eye contact with people around you; smile and be open to others approaching you
- Plan activities with friends or family
- Develop a hobby and go to specialty meetings

Ways to Connect

- Find recovery role models
- Send an appreciation note to a friend or family member
- Make a gratitude list
- Cook or bake something to share with someone
- Facetime a friend

Ways to Connect

- Spend time with your pets
- Write a blog post
- Find a support group (or start one!)
- Remind yourself that suffering is a universal human experience and practice compassion for yourself and others

Intense Emotions

- Take a cold shower, or splash cold water on your face
- Hold ice in your hand to add a different sensation (or frozen orange or frozen sponge)
- Practice paced breathing or square breathing
- Tense all your muscles and then release
- Get under a weighted blanket
- Don't act! (Even when everything is telling you to!)

Intense Emotions

- Think of your emotion as a wave--it comes and goes
- Elicit new emotions by practicing opposite actions to your urges (i.e. if sad, watch a comedy or scary movie)
- Change the environment. Go into a different room, leave the house, invite a friend over, turn the lights on or off, play music... Provide your brain with different cues
- Ask for support. Contact your therapist, your coach, your recovery buddy, or a crisis hotline.

Intense Emotions

- Write out or read over coping statements to yourself
- Journal your feelings and thoughts
- Expansion exercise from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Scream into a pillow, or rip up a magazine or junk mail.
- Identify and name your emotion. Notice where you feel it in your body, and practice responding with self-compassion.

Intrusive Thoughts

- Soothe with all of your senses.
- Get a song stuck in your head
- Practice the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise. Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 smells, 1 strength about you
- Listen to a podcast
- Count to 100 (over and over if needed)
- Count backwards by 3s from a random number

Intrusive Thoughts

- Think of an animal for each letter of the alphabet (can do this with any category)
- Use a Defusion exercise from ACT, such as thinking, "I notice I'm having the thought that....."
- Remember thoughts are JUST thoughts. They are not facts
- Write down the thoughts and put them away

Intrusive Thoughts

- Watch cute animal videos on YouTube.
- Sing your thoughts
- Write Down Mantras and Decorate them
- Try a “letting go” meditation on Insight Timer
- Do a form of joyful movement, such as walking, gentle yoga, or dancing to music, to connect with your body
- Don’t act on unhelpful thoughts (it will only make them stronger)

Calming Activities

- Create a coping box, filled with sensory comforts like a roller ball with her favorite essential oil, a candle, a mosaic sticker pad, a small stuffed animal, kind messages from loved ones, herbal tea, etc.
- Practice the 5 Senses Grounding Exercise
- Create a mental image in detail of a calm place (i.e. sitting in the park, on the sand at the beach). Visualize your calm place and sensations you would feel in your body while at this calm place
- Try progressive muscle relaxation

Calming Activities

- Watch relaxing scenes on Youtube (ocean, a fire, etc.)
- Draw your emotion
- Google cute baby animal photos
- Take a bubble bath
- Watch favorite show or movie
- Do a puzzle
- Read or write a poem

Calming Activities

- Smell an essential oil i.e. lavender, orange, lemon, etc or a candle.
- Look at old pictures that make you happy
- Make a collage
- Garden
- Tara Brach's RAIN exercise or any favorite guided meditation
- Write or sing a song
- Spend time in nature.

Calming Activities

- Sit outside.
- Lie down on a blanket to do some stargazing.
- Walk around the block, or open a window if you can.
- Try scrapbooking/Collaging
- Anti-Anxiety Breathing from the 8 Keys to Recovery book
- Color or draw
- Read

Calming Activities

- Spend time with people you feel happy to be around
- Spend time with a pet
- Crossword puzzle
- Restorative yoga class
- Find a distraction or soothing activity that matches your energy's intensity level

Don't Give Up

- Make a bucket list of things you want to do in your lifetime that have nothing to do with your eating disorder
- Write a letter to your future self
- Before you give up on recovery, remember all the reasons why you started.
- Think about all of the hard things you have already done successfully.

Don't Give Up

- This moment may feel impossible now, but you can do hard things and it will get easier!
- Give yourself permission to be imperfect—even for 3 seconds.
- Challenge yourself to do something imperfectly every week.

Don't Give Up

Brainstorm ways to give yourself a break while doing hard recovery work. Can you:

- Shorten your to-do list?
- Give yourself some mini breaks in the afternoon to just breathe?
- Unplug from technology for 30 minutes?
- Reserve socializing this week for the people in your life who consistently uplift and encourage you?
- Cuddle with your pet?

Don't Give Up

- It's exhausting to feel like you have to pretend. Practice acknowledging how you truly feel and what you want to say about it, even to yourself. This helps your inner wise voice get stronger.
- Try Kristen Neff's Compassion Break exercise
- Connect with others who understand — join a support group or find a recovery coach or mentor

Coping Statements

- I can take my recovery, one day or one moment at a time.
- I will feel proud of myself for not acting on this eating disorder urge
- Listening to my eating disorder will make me feel better for 3 minutes, and then I always feel worse after.
- No amount of food or food restriction can solve this emotional problem.

Coping Statements

- I can always go back to my eating disorder, but what if I tried something different this time?
- Just because my eating disorder tells me to do something, it doesn't mean that I need to listen.
- I deserve to be kind and compassionate with myself.
- I am enough, just as I am.

Pro-Recovery

- Have a conversation with your eating disorder voice. What is it trying to protect you from? And how can you start showing it that you're able and willing to meet those core emotional needs—in ways that don't involve hurting yourself?
- Be ruthless about how you use social media and who you follow, and diversify your feed.
- Make recovery notecards: make a list of reasons why you are recovering, what you are recovering to, healthy self statements to have on hand during difficult meals or snacks

Pro-Recovery

- Make a coping plan in advance for upcoming event or situations you find stressful, such as holiday gatherings. What are some healthy coping tools you can use? Who can you reach out to for support, and how will you do this?
- Create red, yellow, green flashcards:

Red - list all the signs you are in relapse

Yellow - list all the signs that you are beginning to slip back into the eating disorder

Green - list all the signs you are solid in your recovery (Make Copies and share with your support people)

Pro-Recovery

- Create a Recovery Vision Board
- Write a thank you letter to the eating disorder for the ways it has tried to protect you, and share it with your therapist.
- Write a Goodbye Letter to the eating disorder

Pro-Recovery

- Make a list of your top 5 eating disorder triggers, 10 coping skills you like, and at least 3 support people or resources you can reach out to when you're struggling
- Pick something specific that you are struggling with, and write down some wise-minded coping statements. Record these on your phone in a voice recorder and then play them back to yourself at least once a day to start to rewire the neural pathways in your brain.