6 Takeaways from More Feet on the Ground's Body Image & Eating Disorder Workshop

The More Feet on the Ground Campaign
An initiative created by Brock University in partnership with Niagara College and local mental health service providers that aims to address gaps in mental health information in postsecondary schools across Ontario.

Key Terms to Remember

Body Image: Mental picture you have of your body. Healthy body image depends on perceived importance and satisfaction with physical appearance.

Self Esteem: Overall opinion of one’s self; personal value and respect.

Eating Disorder: Preoccupation with food and weight that can cause serious physical problems.

It’s all connected! Body image and self esteem are closely connected; it is hard to feel good about yourself if you hate your body, and its hard to love your body if you don’t feel good about yourself! In some cases, poor body image and self esteem can increase body modification behaviours, possibly resulting in eating disorders.

Common Misconceptions

1) “Body image is all about weight.” Body image can be affected by any aspect of physical appearance, like height, skin, teeth, hair, scars, or symptoms of physical illness!

2) “It’s a women’s issue.” Men are not immune! In fact, it is estimated that about 15% of people with anorexia and 40% of people with binge-eating disorder are men!

Types of Eating Disorders:

ANOREXIA NERVOSA: Self-induced starvation, excessive weight loss, and a fear of gaining weight.

BULIMIA NERVOSA: Repeated binging (excessive or compulsive consumption of food) and purging (ridding of food from the body).

BINGE-EATING DISORDER: Recurring episodes of excessive eating in short periods of time, marked by feelings of lack of control.

PICA: Strong and persistent desire to eat, lick, or chew non-nutritive substances.

RUMINATION DISORDER: Usually seen in children; repeated regurgitation and rechewing food.

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER: Technically an Obsessive Compulsive Related Disorder but it is characterized by a detrimental obsession with a perceived flaw in one’s appearance.

AVOIDANT/RESTRICTIVE FOOD INTAKE DISORDER: Any related problematic behaviour that does not fit one of the aforementioned descriptions.

UNRECOGNIZED EATING DISORDERS

The following disorders have been noticed by health care professionals but are not yet officially recognized in the DSM-V.

OTHOREXIA: Out-of-control obsession with healthy eating that can result in food avoidance and malnutrition.

MUSCLE DYSMORPHIA: Excessive action taken to endlessly build muscle. Fear of being “small” or underdeveloped.
Contributing Factors
Although the cause of eating disorders is unknown, we do know that there are a number of contributing factors. Biological factors like heredity seem to be linked as a females are 12 times more likely to develop Anorexia Nervosa if they have a mother or sister with the disorder. Social factors like beauty standards portrayed by the media can contribute to onset and severity as well. Additionally, the onset of eating disorders has been linked to interpersonal factors like history of trauma, abuse, or bullying.

Treatment Options
Luckily there is a wide array of treatment options for people experiencing eating disorders. Medication can help the brain regulate obsessive thoughts and psychotherapy helps people gain the skills, mindset, and education needed to cope. Eating disorders often present with other mental illnesses so it is important that both disorders be treated concurrently. If you are in a supporting role, remind yourself of the “CPR” of Support.

C
You didn’t cause it, you can’t control it, and you can’t cure it. You can learn how to avoid contributing to it and how to cope with it. Take care of yourself too!

P
Don’t panic! Remember, recovery is a process. Progress is the goal, not perfection. Patience is critical.

R
Remember to listen, and reflect before you speak. Recovery is a journey, a long road that includes relapse. Reach out to others for support.

Resources:
For more information and additional resources, please visit www.morefeetontheground.ca