

TEN ESSENTIAL TRUTHS FOR PARENTS ABOUT ANOREXIA NERVOSA

1. Restoration of a healthy weight is the priority early on in treatment of anorexia nervosa (AN). Nothing else can be healed before patients are nourished.
2. Food is the most important medicine, as important as antibiotics for severe infections, or chemotherapy for cancer. Simply put, energy into the body needs to be greater than energy leaving the body for AN to be treated.
3. Early in treatment of AN, food is more important than school, sports, and extracurricular activities. The longer kids are malnourished, the tougher AN is to treat. Investment in weight restoration pays long-term dividends.
4. It is a myth that patients with AN are trying to control something. In fact, it is a complete lack of control to eat normally. Patients suffering from AN are not capable of making reasonable decisions about nutrition due to this fear and lack of control. We shouldn't ask them to make these decisions.
5. Patients with AN are terrified to eat. We all have an irrational fear. If we were asked to face that fear 3 to 5 times a day, every day, for the rest of our lives, how would we react? When kids act out, it is their AN; they are trying to protect themselves from this irrational fear.
6. Choice is not helpful. Though it seems humane to give dietary options to a patient with AN, it actually leads to increased anxiety. Allowing veganism, vegetarianism, or other restrictive diets makes treatment far more difficult or impossible.
7. Good cop/bad cop never works. AN will exploit this dynamic and the good cop will always win. AN will hold out for the salad without dressing if there is any chance. A unified approach is critical.
8. Family-based treatment (FBT) is the most promising method of treating child and adolescent AN. FBT is not always easy to access, and it is important to ask your kid's doctor how to receive this treatment when it is appropriate.
9. Early in treatment, the psychological causes of AN are not very important. There is no chance to work through the psychological aspects of AN when the brain is malnourished.
10. Respite is important. Take care of yourselves as parents and family to best take care of your child.

RESOURCES

- <https://www.feast-ed.org/> (multiple languages, including Arabic, Chinese (simplified), Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish).
- <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/> (has information in English and Spanish)
- <http://www.maudsleyparents.org/>
- *Help Your Teenager Beat an Eating Disorder, 2nd ed.* (Lock & Le Grange, Guilford 2015, \$15-\$20)
<https://bookshop.org/books/help-your-teenager-beat-an-eating-disorder-second-edition/9781462517480> Can be checked out of the Chicago Public Library (ebook).
- *If Your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder, 2nd ed.* (Walsh & Glasofer, Oxford University Press 2020, \$15.95)
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/if-your-adolescent-has-an-eating-disorder-9780190076825?cc=us&lang=en#>
- First edition of this book (2005) can be downloaded for free in English or Spanish
<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/publication/if-your-adolescent-has-an-eating-disorder/>
- Academy for Eating Disorders (professional) <https://www.aedweb.org/home>