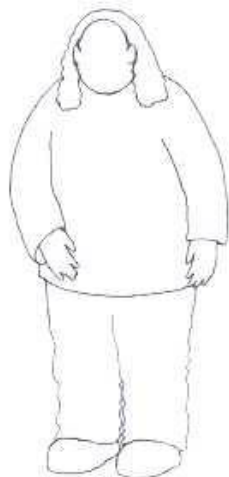

DISORDERED EATING

Poor eating habits may result in a wide variety of physical or emotional concerns. Whatever the cause of poor eating, regaining healthy diet and exercise habits when recovering from trauma is helpful to the success of your recovery.

Living with unhealthy eating habits affects many veterans significantly. Some adjust well, but all run the risk of serious physical complications such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol, osteoporosis, or skeletal problems. Emotional difficulties such as anger, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, guilt, or frustration are frequently experienced by the veteran or family.



Some overeat as a negative coping skill to cover feelings of stress, anxiety, grief, or any feeling with which they cannot or have not coped. The food abuser is literally feeding the pain. The trouble is, pain that deep cannot be satiated. The hunger will return. There is a feeling of lack of control, pain, self loathing, more hunger, more pain; lack of control, the feeling of fullness doesn't last for long.

Some overeaters purge after eating by vomiting or using laxatives. This is called bulimia and requires specific, specialized treatment. Vet Center staff can help you with a referral to the appropriate professional. The Internet has many websites but take care to stay with sites that are endorsed by reputable medical and psychiatric professionals. This is why you are encouraged to begin at the Vet Centers. They are a safe place to start.

Gaining insight into why you overeat is a process. You need to learn why you crave foods that are not good for you or increase your weight and what triggers your overeating. You need to want to make changes knowing some of the changes will not be easy. Basic changes will be to find a food plan that works for your life style. Remember, you are in this for the long haul. You may find you feel better when you avoid eating when you are anxious, between meals or after 7 P.M.

Learn, with your counselor's support, to take control of your life; daily activities, begin a new hobby, join an exercise group, or try walking daily. Share your thoughts and feelings with significant others in your life and ask for help! Read about foods to learn the truth on labels. You may be surprised at the actual contents. Try rewarding yourself in non-food ways when things are going well. Increase social interactions, make positive self statements even if they are small and you are not sure you believe them at first. If you are positive repeatedly you will eventually believe what you are saying.

Abuse of food can be a prison for some. If it is that for you, there is help. If you are abusing food in any way, there is help and understanding within your mental health community. If you do not get the support or answers you need, keep asking until you do! Your good health is worth the seeking. Your healthy self is in there.

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