

**RECOVERY SESSION:**

# HOW DO I START RECOVERY?



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## DISCLAIMER

*This resource is a living document and is open to change. It was created by students from within the **Body Brave** community and may not be fully representative of the spectrum of experience. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource or lived experiences that you don't see represented here, please email us at [info@bodybrave.ca](mailto:info@bodybrave.ca).*

## HOW DO I START RECOVERY?

Just as eating disorders themselves are complex and multifaceted, recovery can be equally complex. It means something different to everyone who experiences it, and because of that there is no single way to start recovery.

Of course we wish there was an equation we could give you that would get you started! Starting recovery can look different for different people, but for everyone it requires one thing: a willingness to try. Maybe that will mean trying to reframe your thoughts, trying to adjust your actions, or trying to approach things differently. These things won't always work, they won't always be pretty or feel comfortable, but they are important. This handout is meant to help guide you through thinking about how you might best begin recovering from an eating disorder.

*"You don't have to be ready to recover.  
You just have to be willing."*



## WHAT IS RECOVERY?

Here's the thing...recovery is hard work. It takes a lot of time, self-awareness, and unfortunately being a bit uncomfortable and challenging yourself. Recovery can involve a lot of big and transformative aspects:

- Recognizing untrue or disordered thoughts, rewriting those narratives
- Noticing less healthy or toxic patterns or behaviours, honouring them, and then working to create healthier new habits
- Changing how you define many things, including strength, weakness, health, and support
- Creating sustainable recovery-based habits (journaling, meditation, movement, etc)
- Being honest with your support systems and working towards being vulnerable with the people around you
- Learning how to be patient, and offer yourself grace
- Seeking to understand old ways of coping that are no longer serving you and exploring new techniques!
- Fighting the nostalgia of an eating disorder, and working towards implementing tools in your present day to help with this
- Having tough conversations and setting hard boundaries
- Making the choice to actively reach out to someone and building a supportive community
- Recognizing, owning and forgiving yourself for the ways you may have hurt people while you were hurting
- Grieving what you've lost and hopefully taking something from your struggle as it has shaped you into the person you are now
- Thinking you're healed and then falling backwards, trying again and again

These things might feel completely overwhelming, and to try to take them all on at once definitely would be! All aspects of recovery, no matter how big they seem, start with a willingness to chance and a small action.

*“Recovery isn’t immediate. It takes time.  
But it’s time well spent.”*

LAURA JACOBSEN, "WHEN THERAPY DOESN'T WORK AT FIRST"

## FIND AN ENTRY POINT

An "entry point" to recovery just means finding **one or two things** you can do that feel manageable and sustainable. These small actions of course are a big part of recovery, but if it feels overwhelming you can also think of it as giving recovery a test-run:

### *Introduce Positive, Non-ED Experiences*

- Do something simple and enjoyable at a sustainable rate (maybe every day, maybe 3 times a week, etc)
  - Examples: read a few pages of a new book, doodle something, listen to your favourite song, sing in the shower, go for a short walk, etc!
- Add in additional activities that you might not do regularly
  - Examples: try a new hobby, say hi to an old friend, take up an instrument, paint something!
- Allow yourself to feel positive things
  - Examples: reminisce on nice experiences you've had, focus on your feeling when you are feeling good, take note of how joy feels in your body

### *Reduce Negative Emotional and Physical Vulnerability*

- Work on incorporating as many mental health basics as you can
  - Examples: getting sleep, drinking water, eat something if you can, get outside (and baby steps are great: 5 hours of sleep are better than 4, two meals are better than one, etc)
- Take your medications, avoid sabotaging yourself by not taking them when you know they help you
- Set yourself up for a positive mindset
  - Examples: make small plans that you can and will do every day -> this gives you a sense of control over your life and helps you believe in your own abilities, reflect on what parts of a day are hardest for you and plan to work to meet your needs at that time (if the afternoon is the hardest part of the day for you plan to go for a walk at that time, or save a youtube video you're excited about to watch then)

## ***Build Emotional Awareness***

- Practice acknowledging and naming your emotions in the moment you are feeling them, and even what might have triggered those emotions
- Process: I have a feeling I don't want - what now?
- What am I feeling? (ex. angry, sad, guilty...)
- What impulse does this feeling give me, what do I want to do? (ex. lash out, isolate myself, self harm...)
- What made me feel this way? (ex. a fight, a bad grade, a mistake...)
- What would be pros and cons of acting on my impulse? (ex. pro - lashing out would give me relief, con - it would have consequences...)
- What decision do I make?
- What skills or coping mechanisms do I need, if I need them?

## ***Take an Unlearning Inventory***

Recovery is a process of both learning and unlearning so much of what has been missed and what has been taught to us throughout life. Balancing this learning and unlearning is a complex process. Reflect on what parts of your knowing you want or need to unlearn. That doesn't mean you have to stop doing these things overnight, but start to practice recognizing these things when they happen.

Things you might work towards unlearning:

- Bonding with others by talking negatively about your body
- That you should not or unable to enjoy food
- That you have to dislike something about your body
- Applying labels to food based on nutritional content
- Ignoring your body's needs
- Thinking about exercise is punishment
- Black and white thinking
- Applying morality to food
- That your emotions should dictate what you eat at any given time

*"Recovery is a continuous process. It is a journey more than it is a stop. Setting yourself up for future success, learning skills that will last a lifetime, taking the time you need to process things over a while, that is what is most important. You will not be healed in a day, but every day your actions can work towards your healing."*

## **AFFIRMATIONS**

"I am healing every time I consider recovery."

"Choosing recovery is a very brave thing for me to do."

"Bad days are part of the process."

"My eating disorder is not my entire identity."

"I do not have to be perfect and neither does my recovery."

"By wanting to recover I have already made progress."

"Today I prioritize my healing."

"There is a light at the end of the darkness I am facing."

"I'm still healing but I am enough."

"All of my feelings are allowed to be here, because they all serve a purpose and I can honour that."

"Recovery is always possible."

"Just because I am used to feeling this way does not mean I deserve to be."

"I deserve to have my body's most basic needs met simply by merit of being alive."

"I am going to invest more time into healing. I deserve to feel better."

"It's okay to fall back into an old thinking pattern/behaviour that I thought I had recovered from. This is normal and okay."

"I am not my thoughts."

"I deserve to give myself a chance to experience recovery."

"I can be the best version of myself in any body shape/size."

"Showing emotions is healthy and okay."

"I am allowed to feel without taking it out on my body."

"When I fall I am not starting again, I am dancing towards the sunlight. It will be worth it."

## JOURNAL PROMPTS

Journalling is a great way to check-in with yourself, and explore your thoughts and feelings in a tangible way. Even writing jot notes can be a powerful tool. Choose a prompt below to reflect on, maybe you choose one, or choose to do one a day.

You can set a timer for 3-5 minutes, or write for as long as you need.

- What are the things that make me hesitant to recover? What purpose do these things serve?
- What will my recovered life look like?
- What am I like when I am well? What do I enjoy to do? What are my coping skills? How do I like to take care of myself?
- How do my disordered thoughts differ from the truth?
- What would my relationship with food look like if I didn't have my eating disorder at this moment?
- Who am I without my disorder/disordered behaviours?
- What scares you the most about recovery?
- What are the things that make it hard for me to trust myself?
- What changes do I need to make to be able to recover? What boundaries do I need to set or conversations do I need to have?
- What are things I've learned within my disorder? How can I use those things to help me recover?
- Imagine a day without any eating disorder thoughts. What would you be able to spend your time on that is currently being occupied by your ED? What would you eat for the day? What would you wear? What are you currently not doing because of your eating disorder?
- What are 10 things you hope to learn in recovery?

## **FURTHER LEARNING**

### **Podcasts**

We Eat The F\*cking Food: Episode 2 Picture Me This, We Recover

The Recovery Warrior Show: Shifting Your Mindset for a Sustainable Recovery

The Recovery Warrior Show: Eating Disorders in Your 40's...Is it possible to recover?

The Eating Disorder Therapist Podcast: Setting Eating Disorder Recovery Goals for 2022

Holistic Health Radio: Episode 94: How to Get Started and Commit to ED Recovery

Holistic Health Radio: Episode 138 The 7 Biggest Reasons You're Delaying Recovery

### **Reading**

Initiating and Following Through with Eating Disorder Recovery

A Dietitian's Journey of Recovering from an Eating Disorder

10 People Who Have Dealt With Eating Disorders Share What Recovery Looks Like for Them

Favorite Tips for Eating Disorder Recovery