

Maintain Your Eating Disorder Recovery on Campus



Maintaining sobriety on campus is no easy feat. Campus Recovery Communities make this challenging task a little bit easier by providing students with a central location and access to services. But what about students in recovery from eating disorders? Not all CRCs are set up to help this growing group of students who need support.

To explore further, I asked experts for their take on how eating disorder recovery intersects with the college experience and what post-treatment they recommend for students who want to maintain their recovery.

Several themes emerged: Have a plan in place before you get to school. Link up with a treatment team ASAP, either on- or off-campus, even if you think you don't need them right away. Know your warning signs, so you can step up your treatment long before a relapse. Avoid isolating yourself and

spend time with supportive students, whether individually, in a support group specifically for eating disorder recovery, or in a general recovery campus setting. Don't compare your recovery process with others who are further along or experiencing things differently. Maintain hope. Remember that college is not just about academics, but about learning and practicing self-care and other life-long skills.

Here are some of their specific suggestions to achieve these goals.

Dawn Hynes, MSW, Founder and CEO of Hynes Recovery Services in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Before you start or return to school, make calls and search online to get a sense of what the recovery community is like and what types of support are available through the school. At schools without a



By **JESSICA SETNICK**

centralized recovery campus, services may be scattered throughout many departments. These may include the health center and counseling center (which may be in two separate locations), the dean's office, peer advising, residence life, students with disabilities office, athletic department and others.

Questions to ask during this process:

Is there access to ongoing counseling on campus? What about a dietitian? If yes, is it free to students or is there a cost? If no, do you have contacts in the community, or do I need to do my own research to find an experienced doctor, counselor and dietitian in town? What is the procedure for arranging to take a medical leave if I have to go into treatment for my eating disorder? Who do I contact to make arrangements? Can my parents make the call or does it have to be my doctor? Once I complete my treatment, can I immediately re-enroll? Or will I have to wait till the next semester or following year? What are the requirements to return to school?

Once you have your team in place, meet with each provider at least once, so that you are not introducing yourself at a time of crisis. If the school does not assign you a main contact person, select who you would like this person to be. Ideally this is someone who is knowledgeable about the resources on campus and with whom you can share your eating disorder history, your recovery, and what you need to manage your recovery in college. You may choose a doctor, dietitian, nurse, counselor, advisor, coach, or dean. Decide together with this person how often you will check in, even when everything is going fine. Describe what happens when you are struggling and compile a list of indicators that your recovery is in jeopardy, such as sleeping in and skipping breakfast,

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or exercising beyond your regular routine. Discuss what steps you will take if you start to observe these signs. How will you rein them in or increase your support?

It's important to outline your plan in advance so that you are prepared. This will also reassure your treatment team and family that you are genuinely committed to maintaining your recovery, not just waiting till college to relapse.

Adrien Paczosa, RD, CEDRD, Eating Disorder Dietitian and Owner of iLiveWell Nutrition Therapy in Austin, Texas

Find a team and meet with them. No matter where you are in recovery, it's important to set up a treatment team in a new town. Meet with each person and begin a relationship so if anything changes in your recovery, you have a team you have met that knows a bit about you.

Know your warning signs and let someone around you know. Everyone has warning signs when their eating disorder is sneaking back into their life, so being authentic and open about them up front can help those around you build a safety net before you fall.

Adrienne Ressler, LMSW, CEDS, Vice President Professional Development, the Renfrew Center Foundation, Coconut Creek, Florida

Maintaining recovery in college requires an environment of people and experiences that provide you with hope. It's very easy, especially if you've been in and out of treatment, if you have had setbacks, to give up hope. For the times you don't believe in yourself, you need people to turn to who totally and completely support you and your recovery. Connecting to your spirituality, in whatever way gives you strength, can also be a source of comfort and courage. The Recovery Campus movement can be very valuable to a student in eating disorder

recovery because even if a school doesn't provide specific eating disorder-related programming, the Recovery Campus is a setting to seek and find unconditional support.

Keep in mind that your version of recovery may be different than any other student. Be cautious that you don't compare your recovery to anyone else's because everyone's disorder and recovery has different circumstances. For example, when you are in a support group setting, gather hope from the process others have been through, rather than getting discouraged that you're not further along. The goal is to be realistic and resilient so that setbacks don't cause a relapse. Many times individuals with eating disorders have a mindset of "perfect" recovery. This is a trap that can lead to disappointment when something doesn't go as planned.


Recovery in college offers an opportunity to look beyond basic symptom management that you

learned in treatment to the bigger picture of how you want your life to look. This is part of the developmental process of going to college – life learning in addition to classroom learning. If you start to doubt yourself, remember the internal strengths you have used to fight back and survive, and appreciate and reinforce the elements within that got you this far.

Mandy Baker, MS, LCDC, former Associate Director at the Texas Tech University Center for the Study of Addiction Recovery, currently Clinical Program Consultant for 164 Recovery Center in Hubbard, Texas

Eating disorders tend to cause isolation. In recovery, we have to step out of comfort zones and push ourselves to be 'a part of' rather than 'apart from'. Seek out the Recovery Campus, even if it doesn't offer eating disorder-specific support because we all need similar things in order to maintain recovery.

Once we get over the symptoms of our disease, whatever the manifestations are, whether eating, drinking, gambling, sex... we still have the deeper issues to tackle.

Targeted recovery support is best, but general recovery support works too. Any time you can be with a group striving toward wellness in recovery is a benefit, even if other members of the group have had different experiences. 

Jessica Setnick, MS, RD, CEDRD, is a Senior Fellow at Remuda Ranch at the Meadows and the author of The Eating Disorders Clinical Pocket Guide, Eating Disorders Boot Camp Training Workshop for Professionals, and the soon to be released Managing Eating Disorders on Campus. She would love to hear your thoughts at Jessica@Understand-nutrition.com.



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