



Eating Disorders Outpatient Treatment

Frequently asked questions

Recovery from an eating disorder is a complex process. We want you to ask questions along the way. Here are some questions that we often hear from families getting treatment in our outpatient clinics.

Will my insurance cover services from Seattle Children's Adolescent Medicine, Psychiatry and Nutrition Clinics?

Many insurance plans cover adolescent medicine, mental health and nutrition services at Children's. For many families, mental health insurance coverage can be different than medical coverage. We can help you understand what your policy covers. You can also talk to Children's financial counselors about your questions. If your insurance does not cover services at Children's, you can talk to a Children's financial counselor for help.

Can my child continue to see a community-based provider, ARNP, MD, nutritionist, mental health counselor or psychiatrist?

Yes. We expect and welcome close contact among all providers treating your child. You will need to complete a release of information form so that we can talk about your child with the community provider. This is called coordinating care. Please ask about completing this form at your first visit. In Adolescent Medicine, we prefer to do a medical consultation directly with your child to find out the severity of the illness. Then we can make a recommendation for future management.

How long does it take to recover from an eating disorder?

Recovery times vary and depend on many things:

- How motivated and committed your child and family are to following the treatment plan
- How ill your child is
- How much your child uses eating disordered thoughts and behaviors
- Whether there are other concerns

You should expect treatment to last many months at a minimum. In some cases, it lasts years.

How do we see a provider in Adolescent Medicine or Clinical Nutrition after the pre-care conference?

We will do a medical exam of your child during the pre-care conference. This may lead to follow up in the Adolescent Medicine Clinic. We can make referrals to Adolescent Medicine and Nutrition after the pre-care conference if needed.

How are parents included in the process of recovery?

We meet with parents regularly. You are important members of the treatment team. We keep parents up to date on progress and encourage sharing information, as appropriate for teen development, between providers, teens and parents. Parents are expected to give support and help guide their child in the recovery process.

What is the best way for me to talk with my child's team?

If you have a question for a provider, ask the provider who is best qualified to answer the question. For example, if you have a question about heart rate, menstrual periods or level of exercise, you would ask the medical provider. If you are asking about food types, variety, portions or questions about how a food or eating pattern helps your teen, you would ask the nutritionist. Ask the mental health provider questions about emotional health. Keep in mind that there is always some crossover of what providers talk about. For example, the therapist and the nutritionist may discuss body image.

What if my child does not like a member of the team?

We try our best to connect with your child and family. If your child doesn't like a team member, we will have an open talk to hear your child's concerns and try to find a way to work together. The provider may recommend another provider, although this doesn't happen often.

How will I learn about the treatment goals for my child?

When treatment starts, you, your child and the team of providers come up with a set of treatment goals together. These goals are achievable and support success. Treatment goals and planning change as treatment continues. Parents are always invited to share their ideas and concerns.

How will you tell me about my child's condition — weight, vitals, progress towards goals?

General progress is always shared with the teen and family. We will discuss vital signs with you and your child after each visit. We will only talk about weight if we think it will support recovery. The therapist will talk about progress with psychotherapy goals with you and your child often.

How often do patients have to stay in the hospital?

Hospital stays are only for patients who are not medically stable. The outpatient team works hard to prevent hospital stays. Hospital stays are not a normal part of treatment but can happen under life-threatening circumstances.

What are signs that my child needs a medical hospital stay?

- Heart rate less than or equal to 40 beats per minute
- Blood pressure less than 80/50
- Changes in vital signs that could be from severe dehydration
- Electrolyte instability combined with very low weight

What is the difference between a medical hospital stay and an inpatient eating disorder hospital stay?

A medical hospital stay treats only the serious medical problems that come from severe eating disordered behaviors. The stay is usually on the medical floor. It lasts a few days and is followed by more intense outpatient or inpatient treatment.

An inpatient eating disorder hospital stay is intense treatment for all parts of the eating disorder — medical, nutrition and mental health. It involves you and your child. Admission to an inpatient eating disorders program usually lasts much longer than a medical admission — usually several weeks.

Will we get a meal plan?

The nutritionist will get to know your child and will then teach them to understand what their body needs. Most kids are doing some things well. Your child needs to know what is going well and build skills from there. Your child needs to learn to trust their body. If we decide a meal plan would be a useful tool for your child, we will give you one.

Will my child's activities be limited?

Your child's activities will be limited if medically needed. We want your child to live a full life, but medical concerns take a priority. The goal is to get your child stable and active again.

What mental health treatment will be needed?

Your child will go to individual therapy and possibly group therapy. Your family should be ready to take part in family therapy and/or be involved in parts of the individual therapy. You can take classes to learn how to support your child with the re-feeding process (meal support). We also offer parenting skills classes. We may also recommend psychiatric medicines if there are other concerns, such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, severe rigidity or delusional thinking.

How often will my child be seen?

Your child's progress will guide how often we need to see them. At first, we may need to see your child many times a week among the individual providers (medicine, nutrition, mental health). If progress goes well, the need for medical and nutrition visits drop off. Visits will usually be at least monthly and at most two times per week with the medical provider. Sometimes we will order lab tests, depending on the amount of weight loss and how the weight was lost. Mental health visits will be needed less often once your child, you and the therapist all agree that positive changes are well established and there is less worry about relapse. If progress does not go well, plan to have many appointments a week, because each provider will need to keep close track of your child and give you more support and ideas for change.

Why aren't the clinics all on the same day, in the same location?

Children's Adolescent Medicine, Nutrition and Psychiatry Clinics work together to provide eating disorders services. Each clinic sees other patients in addition to the patients with eating disorders. Currently, there is no single dedicated clinic at Children's that only treats eating disorders. Also, many appointments on the same day can be tiring for your child and may not be as productive as when they are spread out over the week.

How will I know if the providers are communicating with each other?

We work hard to provide complete and coordinated care. Providers from nutrition, medicine and mental health meet weekly to discuss shared patients. All providers at Children's who work with your child have access to your child's medical record. We will ask you and your child to sign consent forms for communication between specialists not in the Children's Hospital clinics. Providers usually talk weekly either through phone calls or by e-mail.

Can I call or e-mail my child's providers?

You can call or e-mail your child's providers, but please understand that not all calls or e-mails may be returned. We may wait until the next scheduled clinic visit to talk about your concern. For medical or nutrition issues, please call our Adolescent Medicine nurses at 206-987-3005. Please do not use e-mail for urgent concerns. We recommend calling your child's primary medical doctor if there are urgent concerns. The primary medical doctor can decide if your child is dehydrated or needs other treatment.

Why do I have to wait so long to get an appointment?

There is a very high demand for services here at Children's, and there is a limited number of providers. We try our best to respond to all requests for services. If the waiting time is too long for you, we can give you contact

To Learn More

Children's Eating Disorder Services:

- General Questions - Adolescent Medicine
206-987-2028
- Medical and Nutrition Management – Adolescent Medicine Nursing Line
206-987-3005
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
206-987-3560
- To enroll for Adolescent Medicine Eating Disorders Services (including Adolescent Nutrition), please have your primary care doctor call Children's Scheduling Center at 206-987-2028, option 1, to make a referral.
Or, your doctor can fill out a New Appointment Referral Form (NARF) online at www.seattlechildrens.org

information for providers in the community who may be able to see your child sooner.

Why do I have to wait so long in clinic to see a provider?

Our priority in the Adolescent Medicine and Nutrition Clinics is to provide the care that a patient needs at the scheduled visit. Treatment for an eating disorder is complex and varies from visit to visit. While we try to start and end visits on time, sometimes we need to spend a bit more time with the teen and family before you. If this happens, we ask that you keep in mind that, if your teen and family ever need extra time, we will be sure you get it. Even though these are 20- to 45-minute visits, they can sometimes take as long as one hour.

How long does each visit take?

ARNP or MD visit:

- 60 minutes for new patients
- 20 to 30 minutes for weekly return visits until your child improves

Registered Dietitian (RD) visit:

- 90 minutes for new patients
- 30 to 45 minutes for weekly return visits until your child improves

Therapist visit:

- 50 to 60 minutes, one or two times a week

Why do I need to see a mental health provider in the community when I see both an MD or ARNP and RD in Adolescent Medicine?

Patients seen in the Mental Health Clinic are followed for longer periods of time, have more frequent visits and are seen for longer appointments. Fewer patients can be enrolled for Mental Health services here at Children's than in the Nutrition and Medicine Clinics. Therefore, the medical and nutrition providers coordinate care with community-based therapists like they do with the therapists at Children's.

Do I have to take a meal support class or have my child in group therapy to take part in this service?

These services are not required, but we may recommend them and encourage your family to take part. Many families and teens have found these additional treatments to be helpful.

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers 206-987-2280 (TTY).

Where can I get more information about eating disorders (i.e., book lists, Web sites, parent support groups)?

Please see the Children's web site at www.seattlechildrens.org. Type "Eating Disorders" in the search box. Choose Eating Disorders Program, and open the "Eating Disorders Booklist and Resources" flyer. This lists several books and Web sites that may be of help to you. You can also go directly to these Web sites:

- National Eating Disorders Association: www.edap.org
- Something Fishy: www.something-fishy.org
- National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Related Disorders: www.anad.org

The inclusion of any Web site link (or resource accessed through this link) does not imply endorsement by Children's. Seek the advice of your child's health care provider before you act or rely upon any information from these resources.