



Do I Look Fat In This?

Maybe he doesn't want to date me because my legs are gross.

I have a gluten allergy.

Hey Siri... How many calories are in half an avocado?

No thanks, I don't like cookies.

If only I looked like her...

I'm actually not hungry right now, you guys go ahead.

No more carbs until bathing suit season is OVER.

Silly little phrases, tiny questions, that get tossed around. Sometimes, they really are just nothing thoughts—it's normal to get down on yourself and your body every now and then.

But for some, these little nothings are the beginnings, or the trappings, or the heart even, of an eating disorder.

Eating disorders themselves, you can read up on. There is plenty of information on the internet or with your school counselor, on the ins and outs of a true mental illness called Eating Disorder. But what nobody's talking about is disordered behavior. Behavior that runs rampant in our day-to-day society, and that can cause an Eating Disorder to sneak up on you, when you never saw it coming.

And if you're reading this and thinking—I've never had thoughts like this, this doesn't apply to me, then I guess read no further. But I would suggest, that you may want to take a good hard look and be sure, because it's hard to escape high school without judging yourself by your body.

Disordered Behaviors can show up as Food Behaviors, Body Image Behaviors, or Exercise Behaviors.

Food Behaviors can look like:

- Skipping meals
- Eating small portions
- Choosing not to eat in front of others
- Always having an excuse not to eat
- Reducing/Drastically reducing fat intake
- Consistently reading food labels
- Consistently going to the bathroom after meals
- Over-eating
- Excessively using breath mints



"One of the most important things I've learned is the power in my own contribution. My contribution to family, to friends, to my industry, to organizations, to strangers, etc. Everything you do – every decision you make – makes a difference, why not make it a positive one? AIR is an incredible organization that inspires kids, teens, and young adults to recognize the strength in their own significance, and I am proud to be a supporter of that mission."

- **Jen Jacob** of HBO's hit TV series *GIRLS* and the movie *Begin Again*, Advocate, and AIR Supporter

Appearance and Body Image Behaviors can look like:

- Losing or gaining weight excessively
- Consistently talking about weight or a diet plan
- Wearing baggy clothing
- Obsessing about clothing size
- Spending lots of time in front of a mirror
- Criticizing what your body looks like

Exercise Behaviors can look like:

- Exercising excessively and/or compulsively
- Refusing to change routine when exhausted or busy
- Changing eating patterns to enhance athletic performance

Having one or some of these behaviors of course does not mean you have an eating disorder. But they are behaviors that are so common that an eating disorder can easily go unnoticed—by the friends and family of someone struggling with an eating disorder, and by the person with the disorder as well.

Eat the COOKIE

That's how mine started. My full-blown eating disorder, if you will, didn't start until sometime after college. But all the signs and symptoms were there for a long time before. I believe the first time I ever discussed diets was with a group of girls in 6th grade. We would promise each other to start our diets again on Monday, when we found ourselves giving in to cake or ice cream at lunch on Friday. If I were to talk to those girls years later, I'm sure they didn't all develop an eating disorder. For the most part, we were just trying to sound "grown up" I guess. But that's the problem right there. Diets, body image, food, and exercise are so engrossed in our culture that a couple of 11 year olds wanted to talk about it to sound cool.

In 8th grade, a boy told me that the veins on my face showed more when I wore my hair in a ponytail. (I STILL don't like having my hair off my face). By 9th grade, let's just say my womanly curves curved a little more than everyone else, and from some unwanted attention, I decided that the reason for those curves were because I was fat, and if I just lost a few pounds... (by the way, I was 5'5" in 9th grade weighing probably about 125 pounds).

In 10th grade, I started to run "to keep in shape." That fall, a boy told me I was looking better since I lost my "love handles." (I had no idea that stupid comment was going to stick with me through my 20's). The summer after Junior year, I got a full-time job, and wasn't always home for lunch and dinner (that's when I learned how to skip meals).

I could go on and on. The point is, you never know. You never know what thought, what choice, what comment could be the beginnings, the red flags, the signs of an eating disorder. And what is so important is knowing that you're not alone. Childhood's hard. Middle school can be the worst. High school? Forget it. Be nice to each other. Be nice to yourselves. Stop judging and sizing each other up. It actually doesn't matter as much as you think it does. I promise. You're beautiful. Anxiety is normal. Speak up. Life is short. Living is extraordinary. Laughter makes everything better. And sometimes, ok, maybe all the time, Cookies do too. Eat the COOKIE.



Start The Conversation • Reverse An Attitude • SAVE A LIFE!

Contact AIR for more information

Visit www.AttitudesInReverse.org • **Call** 609-945-3200 • **Write** info@AttitudesInReverse.org

PLEASE NOTE: AIR is not a counseling service. If you are in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-Talk (1-800-273-8255).

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