

# Eat You

## Getting Help If You or a Friend Has an Eating Disorder

By Karen Datangel, San Francisco State University



Dr. Julie Anné is a licensed clinical psychologist who has specialized in eating disorders for about 20 years. She currently runs the outpatient treatment center A New Beginning in Scottsdale, AZ, and will be appearing on E!'s *What's Eating You?*, a new reality series that documents patients of eating disorders as they seek therapy.

**"Nobody should live life handicapped by an eating disorder. It's a horrible, horrible existence."**

**ULM:** Why are eating disorders common in a young demographic?

**JA:** When there are big transitions in somebody's life, there are underlying, predisposing factors. Leaving for college is a huge stressor. It's a very vulnerable time. It's really easy to focus on outer appearance and think that you need to look a certain way to feel loved and accepted. If they don't have high self-esteem and strong self-concept, those paths are going to show cracks on somebody's emotional foundation.

**ULM:** What are the warning signs of an eating disorder?

**JA:** Certainly the change in weight, and that might be adding weight or losing weight because eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia, compulsive and emotional eating. If you see that somebody is socially isolating, so not going out on Friday or Saturday nights; turning down dinner dates frequently; if you notice excessive exercise; if you go out to eat with somebody and they're picking at their food, moving food around on their plate and not actually eating their food.



**ULM:** How can you talk to a friend if you think they might have a disorder?

**JA:** Please *never* be afraid of addressing this issue with your friends. They have to not be afraid to come forward with care and with love and talk about their concerns. Focus on the emotional characteristics and personality changes, like "I see you don't seem happy anymore" or "You seem like you're really pulling away from us." Sometimes if you *just* address the weight, they will feel very guarded and defensive.

**ULM:** What else should people with an eating disorder know?

**JA:** If someone does feel that they have a problem, the earlier they get into treatment, the easier it is to get out of it. Eating disorders are so complicated that most of the time, people just get deeper down into the disorder and they get hopeless and the behaviors get very entrenched. If they can seek treatment sooner than later, that's better. Nobody should live life handicapped by an eating disorder. It's a horrible, horrible existence. There's a great misconception that people who have eating disorders can never, ever get over them and I fight that myth every day in my professional world. People can absolutely beat disorders and do everyday.