

# 10 TIPS

## for Physicians to recognize eating disorders

### SCOFF Screening Tool

For symptoms of eating disorders

- S** Do you make yourself Sick because you feel uncomfortably full?
- C** Do you worry you have lost Control over how much you eat?
- O** Do you believe yourself to be fat when Others say you are too thin?
- F** Have you recently lost more than Fourteen pounds in a 3 month period?
- F** Would you say that Food dominates your life?

The New South Wales Eating and Dieting Disorder Shared Care Project, University of Sydney Department of Psychological Medicine, March 2000.

### Take Note of These Symptoms:

- A diet that excludes dairy products and meat.
- Withdrawn mood, less expressive and more preoccupied with food and school work.
- Relentless exercise.
- Baggy clothing and reluctance to be examined.
- Slow pulse rate < 60 bpm.
- Discoloured or damaged teeth and gums.
- Large eyes due to decreased facial and peri-orbital fat, non-expressive face and a "small voice" which is low and sounds younger than the stated age.

Morgan, et al. *British Medical Journal* 1999;319; 1467-1468

- 1 If you see children in your practice, consider their parents' attitudes towards weight, especially if the child is overweight. Help the parents focus on healthy behaviours such as increasing physical activity and eating nutritious food rather than on weight loss.
- 2 Ask girls and women if they worry about their weight and how often they 'feel fat.' Watch for girls and women who feel fat all the time. Reframe the question for boys in terms of needing to feel strong.
- 3 Ask your patients if their weight affects how they feel about themselves. How? What are the other things that make them feel good about themselves? Pay attention to girls and women whose entire self-image is tied to their weight.
- 4 Ask your patients if they try to control their weight and, if so, how they do that. How much would they say food dominates their life? Take a family history of dieting because mothers who diet are more likely to have daughters who diet.
- 5 If your patients are concerned about their weight, or if parents are concerned about their children's weight, take a family history of eating disorders and other psychiatric disorders including anxiety and depression because they often tend to run in families.
- 6 Consider the following as warning signs that may indicate an eating disorder (see sidebar). Follow-up these symptoms with further questions or referrals.
- 7 Talk to your patients about their level of anxiety. Encourage them to measure it on a scale of 1 to 10. People at risk of developing an eating disorder often feel a high level of anxiety.
- 8 Check out weight-loss or weight-gain in the past three months. Consider using the SCOFF Screening Tool, which has been validated to determine eating disorder symptomatology (see sidebar).
- 9 Find out if there have been any major transitions in your patients' life in the past three months such as divorce, sickness, or a lot of fighting in the family, loss of a friend or a pet, moving to a new location, changing schools or classes? Loss of relationships can be a trigger for developing an eating disorder.
- 10 Pay attention to how physically active your patients are. While it's exciting to see how many girls and women are participating in sports and are active, this same participation may be a trigger for compulsive exercising.

Prepared for  
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[www.jessieshope.org](http://www.jessieshope.org)

 BC Partners for  
Mental Health and  
Addictions Information  
The BC Partners is funded by  
BC Mental Health and  
Addiction Services.



"SOME PEOPLE ELUDE DIAGNOSIS BECAUSE THEY ARE CONSIDERED 'TOO YOUNG,' 'TOO OLD,' 'DON'T LOOK THE PART,' ..."

Read more guidelines for recognizing when someone may have or be at risk for developing an eating disorder on [www.jessieshope.org](http://www.jessieshope.org).