

# Proper Nutrition and Recovery from Eating Disorders

In his book *Hope, Help and Healing for Eating Disorders* (Shaw, 2002), Christian psychologist and certified eating disorder specialist Gregory L. Jantz, Ph.D., offers a body-mind-spirit approach to healing from eating disorders.

Jantz advocates proper nutrition as an important and often overlooked aspect of treatment for eating disorders. His nutrition-based rehabilitation program starts with nutrients that support the body systems most compromised by an eating disorder and works toward restoration of a person's complete nutritional health.

As a person recovering from an eating disorder works toward making healthy eating choices, Jantz offers the following guidelines, which he has adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

- 1. Eat a variety of foods, even if in very small amounts.** This is an important step for those recovering from eating disorders, Jantz says, because they often associate certain foods with comfort or safety. Re-establishing variety in the diet is a good first step and should include plenty of whole grains, vegetables and fruits.
- 2. Balance eating with physical activity.** The key Jantz stressed is balance. Metabolism is often slowed by an eating disorder, and physical activity works to jump-start the body's metabolism. Whether you need to increase, decrease or maintain your weight, a balanced dose of physical activity is the perfect counterpart for healthy eating.
- 3. Make food choices that are low in fat and cholesterol.** This advice is especially important for people struggling with bulimia or compulsive overeating. Jantz says that binge eaters

often choose high-fat foods or fast foods as comfort foods, but these need to be avoided if total health is to be achieved.

**4. Make food choices that are moderate in sugar content.**

Sugary foods create blood sugar spikes and crashes, and sets the stage for a perpetual cycle of binge eating.

**5. Make food choices that are moderate in salt content.** This goes hand-in-hand with moderating the fat, cholesterol and sugar in the diet. Many compulsive eaters alternate between sweet and salty foods during a binge, Jantz says. He advises clients to watch their eating patterns when it comes to sweet and salty foods.

**6. Limit alcohol consumption.** Jantz says that more than half of his eating disorder clients misuse alcohol. Because compulsive behaviors come in groups, those with eating disorders need to be aware of the potential for abusing alcohol.

**7. Make food choices that are moderate in caffeine content.** According to Jantz, caffeine creates vitamin B deficiencies and can act as a masking agent for symptoms of eating disorders.

Jantz acknowledges that some controversy on this aspect of treatment does exist. But based on his years of experience in treating eating disorders, he says he cannot overstate the importance of incorporating a sound nutritional program in the early stages of treatment. "When your physical body is supported, it can help you find the self-confidence and encouragement to deal with the important emotional, relational and spiritual issues that need to be addressed for your long-term recovery."