

# In EDA, we recognize what we call “milestones of recovery.” What is recovery? What are milestones?

## Recovery

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In recovery we face life challenges without obsessing on food, weight and body image. This does not mean we never have food, weight or body image issues. In recovery, we have the same issues everyone else has from time to time. Recovery means developing healthy perspectives, knowing we can feel safe and confident much of the time, while recognizing that we will still have moments of fear, pain and anger like everyone else. Recovery is not freedom from trouble and pain, but freedom from getting stuck in the quagmire of resentment and self-pity.

Before recovery, we binged, starved, purged, and obsessed in an effort to manage unwelcome emotions. The solution to an eating disorder has to do with accepting our thoughts and feelings, and finding safe and responsible ways to express them. There is no magic about recovery. When we take responsibility for understanding our needs and getting them met, and work the program of recovery, we walk free. It sounds so simple, but it is hard work, especially at first.

Recovery means rebuilding trust with ourselves and others; taking careful risks to learn what is safe and good for us. As we practice careful self-honesty and self-disclosure we regain perspective. Perspective enables us to see our options and make careful, responsible choices in our lives. As we learn careful self-expression, we regain lost authenticity, peace, and power. Working the Twelve Steps of the EDA program provides the peace and power needed to make lasting changes in perspective that enable us to break free from our eating disorders, develop balance, and recover. In all things, we aim for progress, not perfection. It is very important for us to claim our successes in achieving balance, attaining perspective, identifying and meeting our needs, and developing more resilient relationships with ourselves, with others, and with food.

## Milestones

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A “milestone of recovery” is a self-defined marker on our journey in recovery. It is essential to recognize that even on our worst days we do things that are right and good and supportive of our recovery. Milestones – which take myriad, and often, surprising forms – are bright spots in our meetings that inspire us with their honesty and reality. We find, often in retrospect, that our milestones express how we are working the principles of the program in our lives.

The principles – embodied in the 12-Steps of EDA – include:

### **Honestly, Equality, Accountability, Love, Trust, and Humility (*HEALTH: the EDA motto*)**

We claim as many milestones as we can!

## Examples

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- “I ate a food I was afraid of last night for the first time in three years and it was great!”
- “I took responsibility and let go of one of my boyfriends.”
- “I refused to let my wife tell me what to think about our daughter coming out.”
- “I am beginning to see what I have been getting out of having an eating disorder on an emotional level: among other things, it feels like a safe way to express my anger and frustration with life. I think I am ready to work out a different approach to dealing with anger.”
- “I got a sponsor and started working the Steps.”

- “I thought about what might make me happy and decided to take dance lessons.”
- “I forgave my friend for disappointing me. I felt very mature about that.”
- “Ugh! I’m obsessing again, but at least I know it, and I’m being open about it.”
- “I finally weaned myself off laxatives. It’s been twelve years since I’ve gone without them for this long!”
- “I was feeling very hurt and rejected, and I said so calmly, without expecting any particular response.”
- “My need for security always seems to conflict with my need for self-expression. It makes me mad and I want to escape! But I realized I’ll never be safe until I allow myself to have and express ugly thoughts.”
- “I screamed what I was thinking on paper and then I found I could talk about it calmly without blaming.”
- “I wanted to run and hide by being really busy, but I sat down and asked myself what I was afraid of. I made a new plan. My fears evaporated, and I felt terrific!”
- “I was sad yesterday and I just let myself be sad.”
- “I almost ate something I hate because I didn’t want to look eating disordered, but then I decided I care more about what I think about myself than about what they think of me.”
- “I completed my 5<sup>th</sup> Step.”

## Balance in EDA

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In EDA, our aim is balance: a balanced perspective, and a balanced life. We are comfortable with the knowledge that our ideas will grow and expand as we go through life. We strive for progress, not perfection.

We find it helpful to think of balance like the legs of a chair. We need to maintain strength and stability in four areas of life to stay in balance: physical (nutrition/sleep/exercise), mental/intellectual (stimulating/challenging work), emotional/social (strong relationships), and spiritual/purpose-oriented (Higher Power/higher purpose). When any one of these "legs" becomes weak, we are at risk of losing our balance. When we use the tools of recovery – especially Steps Ten through Twelve – on a daily basis to strengthen all four "legs," we can be at peace with ourselves and others: we are at low risk of imbalance.

Balance is different for each person, but we know we are in balance when we are free from obsession with food, weight, exercise and body image. We take care of ourselves because we know we need to be as alert and well-balanced as possible to be of maximum service to those around us. We eat when hungry, stop when moderately full, and resolutely let go of thoughts that get in the way of what really matters.

Recovery is resilient. Once we have developed a manner of thinking that enables us to live without our eating disorders, we know we need never return to our old, damaging and limiting patterns of thought and behavior. When troubled, we take stock, seek to understand where our thinking has gone awry, make amends where needed, and immediately turn our attention to how we can best serve our Higher Power or higher purpose.

With a solid foundation for recovery, built through working the Twelve Steps, we are able to do all sorts of things that used to "trigger" our obsessive thinking and eating disordered behavior. We can go anywhere and do anything that normal folks do, without reengaging our eating disorders.

We find joy and delight in maintaining our balance every day. It is a pattern for living that works in the long run.

If we have worked the Steps and still find ourselves vulnerable to "triggers," we usually find we have fallen down on one of two key aspects of the EDA program of recovery: either we have not put service to others ahead of our own interests, or we have not fully relied on our Higher Power or higher purpose to provide the needed guidance and security. When this happens, we usually find that some form of self-concern – self-centered expectations of others, fear of losing what we already have, fear of not getting what we really need, resentment or self-pity – has overwhelmed the peace that comes from reliance on our Higher Power or higher purpose.

When we start to feel ill at ease, we restore balance by putting first things first. We reestablish trust with ourselves, taking responsibility to ensure that our basic needs are met. Taking care of basic needs means:

- When hungry, we eat.
- When angry, we find a safe outlet.
- When lonely, we reach out.
- When tired, we sleep.
- If ashamed, we talk about it.
- When anxious, we get active, get physical, get outside, pray or meditate

Once our basic needs are addressed, we again pick up the tools of recovery, focusing especially on what we can do each day to be of useful service to our Higher Power, higher purpose and those around us.

It is by working to help others that we maintain perspective and gratitude for what we can do. It is by seeking to contribute to the grand adventure of life that we find joy and meaning. In recovery, we find that all our experiences can serve some good purpose. It works for us. It can work for you, too.

For more information please visit our website at:

[www.4EDA.org](http://www.4EDA.org)

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