

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region's Healthcare's health and wellness show where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life.

I'm Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Ashley McCauley. She's from our primary care department, and she's joining me today to talk about eating disorders. It is National Eating Disorders Screening Day coming up on March 2nd, so we want to talk about this year's theme, Come As You Are, in an effort to include people at all stages of their body acceptance, and to talk about this topic that I don't think is maybe talked about often enough. Thanks for joining us and shedding some light on this topic this morning, Ashley.

Ashley McCauley: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: So when we talk about this topic of eating disorders, there is this National Eating Disorder Screening program. Can you tell me a little bit more about what the goal of the program is and how it works?

Ashley McCauley: Every year around February, we like to screen for mental health, and this includes education and screening such as eating disorders.

Katie Johnson: So what is actually considered an eating disorder? I know in my mind, anorexia comes to my mind, but it's really so much more than that.

Ashley McCauley: Yes. Eating disorders can come in various forms, but it is defined as an illness in which people experience severe disturbances in their eating behaviors, healths, and related thoughts and emotions. People with eating disorders typically become preoccupied with food and their body weight.

Katie Johnson: Do we have any idea how many people struggle with this issue?

Ashley McCauley: Eating disorders are probably more common than you think. It affects many several million people, but most often it's women between age 12 and 35 years of age.

Katie Johnson: Can you give me any sense where how often you see it in the clinic? I think sometimes when we talk about these national screenings and we talk about millions of people nationwide, what does it mean right here in our own community? Is it really something that happens right here at home?

Ashley McCauley: Yes. Many times it is also coupled with mental health disorders, and so we screen for both at the same time, and then talk about their body image, nutrition, and their mental health at the same time to help get a whole picture of how we can correct everything for them.

Katie Johnson: Like so many things, it's kind of that whole picture of health, and interesting how all of them are interrelated. How can we recognize this disorder either in

ourselves or in our kids or those around us? What are some of the warning signs to look for?

Ashley McCauley: There are physical and psychological warning signs. Some physical warning signs include rapid weight loss, fainting or dizziness of unknown reason, feeling tired and not sleepy, low energy, and feeling cold most times even though it may be warm outside. Some physiological warning signs may include feeling anxious, feeling out of control around food, distorted body image, and using food as a source of comfort.

Katie Johnson: I know that sometimes I've heard in teenagers, oftentimes friends are the ones that notice this in their friends. Do you have any advice for maybe teens who might recognize something in friends, what to look for, how to take a next step to help someone that you see might be exhibiting some signs of an eating disorder?

Ashley McCauley: There is a helpline that is available at 1-800-931-2237, and just remember, true beauty is not skin deep. There are many resources and groups available in the community that can help with this.

Katie Johnson: I think that it's important for us all to reinforce that message with ourselves and with others. Any other tips for supporting a loved one who you maybe know is struggling with an eating disorder, things that we can do to show support, or maybe things we shouldn't do or say?

Ashley McCauley: Some things that you can help encourage them is to talk open and honestly. Be gentle, but also show concern for their illness. Be honest about your own fears and struggles that you want to express to them, and remembering an eating disorder is not about food, but it affects their well-being. Some things you don't want to do is trying to act as a therapist, letting your fear, get upset with them, ignoring them, and lying to them and feeling like you're blaming them for something that they may not be able to control.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, I think that's a good point to remember that it is an illness, and to treat it as such. How about, you know, we talked about this being not about food honestly, being more about appreciating our bodies as they are and the mental health aspect of that. How can we make more of a conscious effort as individuals to appreciate ourselves and our bodies just as they are?

Ashley McCauley: Some conscious efforts may be to self-meditate, maybe reminding yourself three good things you have going on that day, meditating and just incorporating some me time into your routine daily activity.

Katie Johnson: It's so interesting that you say that because as I was planning for the show, I was thinking about our community health challenge and how we're taking one week to focus on each of the components of wellness, and I found myself thinking that eating disorders actually fall into so many of these components. We just

came off of the three good things that week, and this concept of gratitude can really make a difference in how we accept ourselves as well, so that's great advice. How about more resources, both on eating disorders, body acceptance, and other things related to our topic today? Do you have some go-to places for people who are looking for more information?

Ashley McCauley: There is the National Eating Disorder Association, and that's at www.nationaleatingdisorders.org, or you can even go to the Lake Region Healthcare web page as a good resource as well.

Katie Johnson: I'm so glad to hear that this is a regular part of screening and that we're making a conscious effort for this, particularly in February as we head towards National Eating Disorders Screening Day, but anything else you want to share with listeners who have this concern about themselves or others?

Ashley McCauley: Don't be shy. Tell someone that you love and trust that you're struggling with this, and that you can get help for this. You don't have to struggle with this on your own.

Katie Johnson: Thank you so much. That's great advice. Ashley McCauley, nurse practitioner in our primary care department here at Lake Region Healthcare talking with us today about National Eating Disorders Screening, offering great suggestions, websites, and advice for anyone who might have a concern about someone they love or about themselves and their relationship with food. I appreciate your time this morning.

Ashley McCauley: Thank you.

Katie Johnson: Ashley McCauley and Katie Johnson on Apple a Day today, reminding you there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.