

Screening for Eating Disorders in the Perinatal Period

Pregnancy is a high risk time for the onset or relapse of disordered eating behavior, but it can also be an opportunity for recovery. Weight and eating habits are closely monitored during pregnancy, however recognizing eating disorder symptoms can still be difficult. Screening with one of the instruments suggested below can greatly increase the odds of detecting an eating disorder in your patients.

Warning signs include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History of eating disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hyperemesis gravidarum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of weight gain over two consecutive prenatal visits in the second trimester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abnormally low body mass index
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexplained hyperkalemia or other electrolyte abnormalities from use of laxatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dental problems indicative of poor dental enamel from frequent emesis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presence of a mood or anxiety disorder 	

One of the two brief screening instruments below can be used to identify patients who may need further evaluation. They each include five clinician administered questions and are ideally suited for a primary care setting.

SCOFF:

1. Do you make yourself **S**ick because you feel uncomfortably full?
2. Do you worry you have lost **C**ontrol over how much you eat?
3. Have you recently lost more than **O**ne stone (14 pounds or 6.35 kg) in a three-month period?
4. Do you believe yourself to be **F**at when others say you are too thin?
5. Would you say that **F**ood dominates your life?

Eating Disorder Screen for Primary Care (ESP):

1. Are you satisfied with your eating patterns? (No is abnormal)
2. Do you ever eat in secret? (Yes is abnormal)
3. Does your weight affect the way you feel about yourself? (Yes is abnormal)
4. Have any members of your family suffered with an eating disorder? (Yes is abnormal)
5. Do you currently suffer with or have you ever suffered in the past with an eating disorder? (Yes is abnormal)

Two or more “yes” responses on the SCOFF or “abnormal” responses on the ESP is strongly associated with an eating disorder diagnosis and suggests need for further evaluation.

Follow up questions after a positive screen may be helpful to clarify. These include but are not limited to:

- Thoughts about desired weight (“What would you like to weigh?” “When you reach a desired/goal weight, how do you feel?”)
- Amount/percentage of time spent thinking about food, weight or shape
- Specifics on typical daily intake (“What did you eat yesterday for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?”)
- Time spent exercising and what
- Frequency of bingeing, vomiting, and laxative, diuretic, and diet pill abuse, both in the prior month and when symptoms were at their worst

Additional Screening Options: The Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q) is a self-report questionnaire based upon the EDE interview. The EDE-Q is very widely used and is also available in many languages:

https://www.credo-oxford.com/pdfs/EDE-Q_6.0.pdf. The PHQ: <https://www.phqscreeners.com/> includes screening questions for bulimia nervosa.