

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Screening for Eating Disorders

Task Force determines that more research is needed to recommend for or against screening in people without symptoms

WASHINGTON, D.C. – OCTOBER 19, 2021 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on screening for eating disorders in adolescents and adults. The Task Force determined there is not enough research to make a recommendation for or against screening for eating disorders. **This is an I statement.** This I statement focuses on people who have no signs or symptoms of an eating disorder.

This is a new topic for the Task Force, and one that is important to address because of the toll that eating disorders take on people and their families. Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions marked by a disturbance in eating or eating-related behaviors that negatively affect physical and social health. The most common eating disorders are anorexia, binge eating disorder, and bulimia.

“Eating disorders can cause serious harm to people’s mental and physical health. The challenge is that we don’t have the evidence to tell us whether or not it’s beneficial to screen people without signs or symptoms in primary care,” says Task Force member Lori Pbert, Ph.D. “It is important that clinicians be aware of the signs and symptoms of eating disorders, listen to any patient concerns about eating, and make sure that people who need it get help.”

Screening for eating disorders has the potential to decrease negative health outcomes and improve health if it leads to early detection and effective treatment. However, there is very limited evidence on the benefits of screening teens and adults without symptoms in primary care, so the Task Force is calling for more research.

“We need more evidence on whether and how screening for eating disorders can improve people’s health,” says Task Force member Michael Silverstein, M.D., M.P.H. “In particular, we need more studies that address the impact of primary care screening on health and quality of life for people who do not have signs, symptoms, or concerns about eating disorders.”

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from October 19, 2021, to November 15, 2021, at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Grade in this recommendation:

I: The balance of benefits and harms cannot be determined.

[Learn more here](#)

Dr. Pbert is a professor in the Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, associate chief of the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine, and founder and director of the Center for Tobacco Treatment Research & Training at the UMass Chan Medical School.

Dr. Silverstein is a professor of pediatrics, chief of the Division of General Academic Pediatrics, and vice chair of research for the Department of Pediatrics at the Boston University School of Medicine. He is also associate chief medical officer for research and population health at Boston Medical Center/Boston University School of Medicine.

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