

Nutritional Considerations in the Treatment of Eating Disorders

Dr. Vaishali V. Raje, Professor, Department of Community Medicine, Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences, Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth, Karad, Maharashtra, Email: vaishalinalawade@yahoo.com

Dr. Aparna G. Pathade Assistant professor, Krishna Institute of Allied Sciences, Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth, Karad, Maharashtra, Email: aparnapathade@gmail.com

Mrs. Ujwala R. Mane Assistant Professor, Krishna Institute of Nursing Sciences, Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth, Karad, Maharashtra, Email:maneuwala14@gmail.com

Abstract: Eating disorders pose intricate challenges necessitating a multifaceted treatment approach that addresses both the physical and psychological dimensions of these conditions. This paper examines the pivotal role of nutritional considerations in the comprehensive treatment of eating disorders. Beginning with a thorough nutritional assessment, the treatment plan integrates strategies such as gradual weight restoration, balanced and flexible eating patterns, psychoeducation, and the incorporation of mindful and intuitive eating practices. Collaboration with mental health professionals in an interdisciplinary framework is emphasized to holistically address the complex nature of eating disorders. Ongoing monitoring, psychoeducational follow-up, and the recognition of challenges in sustaining nutritional improvements are crucial for fostering long-term recovery. The synthesis of these key findings underscores the importance of individualized, evidence-based care in achieving sustained well-being for individuals on the path to recovery from eating disorders. Implications for clinical practice highlight the need for a collaborative and holistic approach, while future research directions aim to further refine and advance treatment modalities in this dynamic field.

Keywords: Nutritional Considerations, Eating Disorders, Comprehensive Treatment, Psychological Recovery, Gradual Weight Restoration, Balanced Eating Patterns, Flexible Eating, Psychoeducation, Mindful Eating,

I. Introduction

Eating disorders, encompassing conditions such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder, represent intricate mental health challenges with profound implications for both physical and psychological well-being [1]. The intersection of distorted eating behaviors, body image concerns, and weight regulation issues necessitates a holistic and multidisciplinary

treatment approach. Among the essential pillars of this comprehensive treatment is the integration of nutritional considerations, acknowledging the profound impact of diet on both the development and recovery from eating disorders. Different eating disorders present unique challenges and require specific considerations in the nutritional assessment process [2]. For individuals with anorexia nervosa, the assessment often focuses on evaluating the severity of malnutrition, risk of refeeding syndrome, and establishing gradual weight restoration goals. In bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder, assessing patterns of bingeing, purging behaviors, and associated nutrient imbalances becomes crucial. Understanding the impact of specific eating disorder behaviors on nutrient absorption, metabolism, and utilization informs the development of targeted nutritional interventions [3]. Moreover, considering the coexistence of psychiatric comorbidities, such as anxiety or depression, is essential in tailoring nutritional assessments to the holistic needs of individuals with eating disorders. Collaboration between dietitians, mental health professionals, and medical practitioners is key to addressing the multifaceted challenges presented by different eating disorders, ensuring a comprehensive and integrated approach to nutritional care.

A. Background

The prevalence of eating disorders has been steadily rising, posing a significant public health concern globally. These disorders often manifest during adolescence and early adulthood, with a range of physical and psychological consequences that can extend into later life. The complex interplay between genetic, environmental, and sociocultural factors contributes to the etiology of eating disorders, making them particularly challenging to address [4]. Research underscores the need for nuanced therapeutic strategies that recognize the multifaceted nature of these conditions, necessitating a synthesis of nutritional science and mental health expertise.

B. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this research is to comprehensively explore and elucidate the pivotal role of nutritional considerations in the treatment of eating disorders. This paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how dietary interventions contribute to the holistic recovery of individuals grappling with these disorders. Through a synthesis of existing literature, clinical insights, and empirical evidence, the paper aims to offer insights into effective nutritional strategies, their application in various types of eating disorders, and their synergy with other

therapeutic modalities [5]. The scope of this research extends beyond conventional nutritional guidance, delving into the individualized and holistic aspects of dietary interventions. It explores the nuances of nutritional assessment, weight restoration strategies, the promotion of balanced and flexible eating patterns, psychoeducation, and the integration of mindful and intuitive eating practices [6]. By doing so, this research aspires to contribute to the evolving landscape of evidence-based practices in the field of eating disorder treatment.

C. Significance of Nutritional Considerations in Eating Disorder Treatment

Nutritional considerations play a pivotal role in the holistic treatment of eating disorders, influencing both the physical recovery and psychological well-being of individuals. Recognizing the significance of nutrition in breaking the cycle of disordered eating, addressing underlying nutritional deficiencies, and fostering a positive relationship with food, this research underscores the crucial role that dietetics and nutritional science play in the broader context of mental health [7]. Furthermore, understanding the complex interplay between nutritional status and psychological well-being emphasizes the need for a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach that integrates the expertise of healthcare professionals across various domains. This research seeks to highlight the importance of nutritional considerations as a cornerstone in the treatment paradigm for eating disorders, promoting a more comprehensive and effective approach to recovery [8].

II. Methods and Tools for Nutritional Assessment

Nutritional assessment serves as a foundational step in the treatment of eating disorders, providing a comprehensive understanding of an individual's dietary habits, nutritional status, and specific needs [9]. This section delves into the various aspects of nutritional assessment, exploring the methods and tools employed, the significance of individualized approaches, and considerations tailored to different eating disorders. Nutritional assessment is a crucial component in the comprehensive treatment of eating disorders, providing valuable insights into an individual's dietary habits, nutritional status, and specific needs [10]. Various methods and tools are employed to conduct a thorough nutritional assessment, allowing healthcare professionals to tailor interventions effectively.

A. Dietary Interviews and Recalls

- +24-Hour Dietary Recall: Individuals are asked to recall all food and beverages consumed in the past 24 hours.
- Food Frequency Questionnaires (FFQ): A more extended assessment capturing dietary habits over a more extended period, usually several months, providing a broader overview of eating patterns.

B. Food Diaries

- Individuals maintain a record of their daily food intake, including types and quantities of foods consumed. This self-reporting tool offers a detailed snapshot of eating behaviors.

C. Anthropometric Measurements

- Body Mass Index (BMI): Calculated using weight and height measurements, BMI is a widely used indicator of body composition and nutritional status.
- Waist-to-Hip Ratio: Helps assess fat distribution and associated health risks.
- Skinfold Thickness Measurements: Used to estimate body fat content.

D. Biochemical Assessment

- Blood Tests: Measure levels of specific nutrients (e.g., iron, vitamin D) and assess overall metabolic health.
- Urinalysis: Detects imbalances or deficiencies in certain nutrients.

E. Body Composition Analysis

- Dual-Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA): Measures bone density and body fat percentage.
- Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis (BIA): Estimates body composition by analyzing electrical impedance.

F. Clinical Assessment

- Physical Examination: Includes assessing signs of malnutrition, such as muscle wasting, hair loss, or brittle nails.
- Medical History: Investigates pre-existing conditions or medications that may impact nutritional status.

G. Nutritional Screening Tools

- Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST): A quick screening tool to identify individuals at risk of malnutrition.

- Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA): Used in older adults to assess nutritional status comprehensively.

H. Emerging Technologies

- Mobile Apps and Wearable Devices: Offer real-time monitoring of dietary habits, physical activity, and overall lifestyle, providing a dynamic assessment.
- Combining these methods allows healthcare professionals to develop a comprehensive understanding of an individual's nutritional status, identify specific dietary patterns, and tailor interventions to address nutritional deficiencies or imbalances. The integration of subjective and objective measures contributes to a more holistic and individualized approach in the treatment of eating disorders.

Method/Tool	Description	Application	Advantages	Limitations
Dietary Interviews and Recalls	- 24-Hour Dietary Recall: Recall of the past day's food intake. - Food Frequency Questionnaires (FFQ): Extended assessment over months.	- Provides detailed information on recent dietary intake. - Captures long-term dietary habits.	- Allows for assessment of specific meals and eating patterns. - Useful for retrospective analysis.	- Relies on accurate recall, which can be subject to bias. - May not capture day-to-day variations in intake.
Food Diaries	- Individuals maintain a record of daily food intake, including types and quantities.	- Offers a detailed snapshot of individual eating behaviors.	- Provides real-time data on dietary choices. - Allows for self-reporting and increased awareness.	- Relies on individuals' accurate and consistent recording. - May influence eating behaviors due to awareness.
Anthropometric	- Body Mass Index	- Indicates	- Widely used	- BMI may not

<p>Measurements</p>	<p>(BMI): Calculated from weight and height. - Waist-to-Hip Ratio: Assesses fat distribution. - Skinfold Thickness Measurements: Estimate body fat content.</p>	<p>overall body composition and nutritional status. - Assesses fat distribution.</p>	<p>and easily calculated. - Useful for tracking changes over time.</p>	<p>distinguish between muscle and fat. - Skinfold measurements require skill for accurate assessment. - Waist-to-hip ratio may not apply universally.</p>
<p>Biochemical Assessment</p>	<p>- Blood Tests: Measure nutrient levels and overall metabolic health. - Urinalysis: Detect imbalances in certain nutrients.</p>	<p>- Provides objective data on nutrient levels and metabolic function.</p>	<p>- Identifies specific nutrient deficiencies or imbalances. - Can guide targeted interventions.</p>	<p>- Results may be influenced by various factors (e.g., hydration status). - May not reflect short-term dietary changes.</p>
<p>Body Composition Analysis</p>	<p>- Dual-Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA): Measures bone density and body fat. - Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis (BIA): Estimates body composition.</p>	<p>- Provides detailed information on bone density and body fat percentage. - Estimates body composition through electrical</p>	<p>- DEXA is considered a gold standard for body composition assessment. - BIA is non-invasive and portable.</p>	<p>- DEXA involves radiation exposure. - BIA results can be influenced by hydration status. - Equipment availability may vary.</p>

		impedance.		
Clinical Assessment	- Physical Examination: Includes signs of malnutrition (e.g., muscle wasting). - Medical History: Explores pre-existing conditions affecting nutrition.	- Identifies physical manifestations of malnutrition. - Considers underlying health conditions.	- Offers a comprehensive evaluation of the individual's overall health. - Considers medical factors impacting nutrition.	- Limited to observable physical signs. - Requires skilled practitioners for accurate assessment.
Nutritional Screening Tools	- Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST): Quick screening for malnutrition risk. - Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA): Comprehensive tool for older adults.	- Efficiently identifies individuals at risk of malnutrition. - Tailored for older adults' unique nutritional challenges.	- Quick and easy to administer. - MNA considers multiple aspects of nutritional status.	- May not capture subtle changes in nutritional status. - Results should be interpreted in conjunction with other assessments.
Emerging Technologies	- Mobile Apps and Wearable Devices: Monitor real-time dietary habits and lifestyle.	- Provides dynamic and real-time data on dietary habits.	- Enhances engagement through technology. - Allows continuous monitoring outside clinical settings.	- Relies on individuals' willingness to use and comply with technology. - May not capture all aspects of dietary intake.

Table 1. Assessment Method Comparative Study

Nutritional assessment involves a combination of subjective and objective measures to gain insights into an individual's dietary intake, nutritional deficiencies, and overall nutritional status. Common methods include dietary recall, food diaries, and nutritional screening questionnaires, which provide valuable qualitative information about eating patterns. Objective measures may include anthropometric assessments (such as weight, height, and body mass index), biochemical markers (such as blood tests to assess nutrient levels), and body composition analysis. These methods collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of an individual's nutritional profile, aiding in the development of targeted interventions. A nuanced picture of an individual's nutritional status. Individualized nutritional assessment is paramount in the context of eating disorder treatment due to the highly personalized nature of these conditions. Each individual's relationship with food, body image concerns, and nutritional needs are unique, necessitating a tailored approach. An individualized assessment takes into account dietary preferences, cultural considerations, co-occurring medical conditions, and the specific challenges posed by the eating disorder. This personalized approach helps create a more targeted and effective nutritional intervention plan, enhancing adherence and promoting sustained recovery. Recognizing the dynamic nature of eating disorders, an individualized assessment allows for the identification of triggers, coping mechanisms, and patterns of disordered eating, guiding the development of strategies to address these specific challenges. It fosters a collaborative and patient-centered therapeutic relationship, empowering individuals to actively participate in their recovery journey.

III. Balanced and Flexible Eating Patterns

Balanced and flexible eating patterns are fundamental components of the nutritional rehabilitation process in the treatment of eating disorders. This section explores the importance of dietary variety, the considerations for nutritional adequacy and deficiency risks, and the pivotal role of balanced nutrition in breaking the cycles of disordered eating.

A. Importance of Dietary Variety

Dietary variety is crucial for supporting overall health and well-being, especially in the context of eating disorders. Encouraging individuals to consume a diverse range of foods from all food groups ensures the intake of essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals necessary for bodily

functions. A varied diet not only provides the body with a spectrum of nutrients but also contributes to a more satisfying and enjoyable eating experience, helping to reshape the relationship individuals have with food. Incorporating different textures, flavors, and types of food fosters a positive and flexible approach to eating. This variety aids in challenging rigid dietary rules or food avoidance behaviors that may be present in individuals with eating disorders. Nutritionists work collaboratively with individuals to develop meal plans that are both nutritionally sound and adaptable to personal preferences, fostering a sustainable and positive relationship with food.

B. Nutritional Adequacy and Deficiency Risks

Ensuring nutritional adequacy while addressing the risks of deficiencies is paramount in the treatment of eating disorders. Individuals with eating disorders are often at risk of inadequate nutrient intake due to restrictive eating behaviors. A focus on balanced nutrition helps mitigate the risks of deficiencies that can adversely impact physical health and impede the recovery process. Nutritionists conduct ongoing assessments to identify potential nutrient gaps and tailor dietary plans to address specific deficiencies. The incorporation of a variety of nutrient-dense foods helps optimize nutritional status and supports the body's physiological functions. This approach not only aids in weight restoration but also contributes to overall health, addressing the multifaceted challenges presented by eating disorders.

C. Role of Balanced Nutrition in Breaking Disordered Eating Cycles

Balanced nutrition plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycles of disordered eating behaviors. Establishing regular and balanced eating patterns helps stabilize blood sugar levels, reducing the likelihood of binge-eating episodes or compensatory behaviors such as purging. It also promotes a more normalized relationship with food, steering individuals away from extremes and fostering a sense of control and autonomy over their eating habits. By emphasizing the importance of regular meals and snacks, healthcare professionals assist individuals in developing a structured and predictable eating routine. This structured approach aids in diminishing anxiety surrounding food, promoting mindful eating practices, and ultimately contributing to a positive and sustainable recovery trajectory.

IV. Challenges and Strategies in Collaboration

- A. While collaboration is essential, it is not without its challenges. One challenge is the potential for communication gaps among professionals from different disciplines. To address this, regular team meetings, shared electronic health records, and standardized communication protocols facilitate seamless information exchange.
- B. Another challenge may involve differing perspectives or approaches among team members. Open dialogue, ongoing professional development, and a shared commitment to evidence-based practices help overcome these challenges, fostering a culture of mutual respect and collaboration.
- C. Additionally, the stigma often associated with mental health conditions can impact collaboration. Efforts to reduce stigma within the healthcare team, as well as in the broader community, contribute to a more supportive and collaborative environment.
- D. Mindful and intuitive eating are therapeutic approaches that hold significant promise in the treatment of eating disorders. This section explores the conceptual framework underlying these practices, their application in eating disorder treatment, and how they empower individuals to reconnect with their body cues.

V. Application in Eating Disorder Treatment

- In the context of eating disorder treatment, mindful and intuitive eating serve as powerful tools to disrupt the patterns of disordered eating and promote a healthier relationship with food. These practices emphasize the importance of attunement to internal cues rather than external rules or restrictions.
- Therapists and dietitians work collaboratively with individuals to introduce mindfulness techniques during meals, encouraging them to engage their senses, savor each bite, and be present without judgment. This approach helps individuals become more aware of the emotional and physiological aspects of eating, fostering a greater understanding of their relationship with food.
- Intuitive eating, integrated into treatment plans, guides individuals to reconnect with their innate hunger and fullness signals. It involves rejecting restrictive diets, challenging food-related fears, and embracing a more flexible and attuned approach to eating. By promoting self-compassion and body acceptance, intuitive eating aligns with broader

recovery goals, empowering individuals to develop a positive relationship with their bodies and food.

VI. Conclusion

The implications for clinical practice are profound. Healthcare professionals engaged in eating disorder treatment must adopt a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach. Individualized care plans that incorporate nutritional, psychological, and medical interventions are essential. Psychoeducation, particularly on mindful and intuitive eating, must be integrated into treatment plans, and ongoing monitoring should be prioritized to facilitate adjustments as individuals progress through recovery. Clinicians should be attuned to the unique challenges associated with sustaining nutritional improvements, emphasizing the need for ongoing support and relapse prevention strategies. Family involvement, where applicable, can enhance treatment outcomes, and the integration of holistic approaches, such as mindfulness and stress reduction techniques, should be considered in clinical practice. Clinicians must also remain vigilant to address societal influences and challenges that may impact the sustained recovery of individuals with eating disorders.

VII. Future Research Directions

As the field of eating disorder treatment evolves, future research directions should explore several areas. Firstly, more research is needed to enhance our understanding of the long-term effectiveness of nutritional interventions in different eating disorders. Additionally, investigating the impact of emerging technologies in nutritional monitoring and support could inform more dynamic and personalized interventions. Research should delve into the intricacies of collaborative care, exploring optimal models for interdisciplinary teamwork and evaluating the effectiveness of different psychoeducational interventions in supporting sustained recovery. Longitudinal studies focusing on the sustained impact of mindful and intuitive eating practices on mental and physical health outcomes are warranted. The exploration of diverse cultural influences on nutritional considerations in eating disorder treatment and tailoring interventions to address unique needs across diverse populations also represents an avenue for future research. Additionally, investigating the role of preventative strategies and early intervention in reducing the prevalence of eating disorders can contribute to more effective public health approaches.

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