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Different way to treat disorders

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From perpetual dieting to diagnosed anorexia, eating disorders remain a significant health issue in the US.

More than one in three "normal dieters" progress to pathological dieting, and 20-25 percent of those people develop a partial or full-syndrome eating disorder, according to the National Eating Disorders Association.

"What we're seeing is this culture of disordered eating. I think it's become the norm," says registered dietitian Jennie Wade.

In March, Wade and Amy Bellamah-Daniel, a registered dietitian and nurse, opened the Body Truth Center for Wellness in Blue Ash to provide an intensive outpatient treatment program tuned to the challenges of living with anorexia, bulimia and other eating disorders. They've had 21 clients.

"We just (didn't) have anything like this in Cincinnati, and there's such a need," says Mount Lookout-based therapist Dr. Pam Owens.

Clients of the Body Truth outpatient program go through their daily routines, with all the stresses and temptations.

Then, from 5:30 to 9 p.m. three days a week, they attend group sessions to learn new ways to look at themselves, their bodies and food.

"When you're (in inpatient therapy) away from your family and work and your normal stressors, and then you come home, sometimes it's like the bubble is popped," Owens says. "(Intensive out-patient) is probably a more realistic picture of life with an eating disorder. You have to continue your normal life while working on yourself."

While many Body Truth clients have been in individual therapy or are coming out of in-patient programs, some have just begun to realize that their dysfunctional eating - anything from binge eating to chronic restrained eating - is disrupting their lives.

"With something that might not be a diagnosed disorder, there's often confusion about 'Do I have an eating disorder?' " says Bellamah-Daniel, who, along with Wade, worked at Christ Hospital's Outpatient Eating Disorder Program before it closed in 2003.

Because the client groups, which are limited to eight, are filled on a rolling basis, people finishing the program can share insights with members just starting on the road to recovery.

"I thought, 'What is this recovery thing?' " recalls Jenny Adamson, a licensed counselor with Body Truth who is recovering from an eating disorder. "To actually hear people talking about even their small steps, it gave me hope."

Meeting several times a week allows members to share daily successes - like eating a whole sandwich - and failures that might seem inconsequential to others. Monday-night nutrition classes focus on relearning what hunger feels like, what a portion size looks like and what to expect when wearing

off laxatives. It's not about how to count calories and read nutrition labels.

"They know, believe me. If they say there are so many calories in something, I believe them," Bellamah-Daniel says.

Families find their support on Wednesday nights, as they learn how best to help a loved one dealing with an eating disorder.

"We'll tell parents that they have to let (their child) do it on their own, but they don't believe it until someone who's been there tells them," Bellamah-Daniel says.

The goal of the program is to help people move forward, not emerge "recovered," Wade says. Most clients continue in individual therapy and with Body Truth's weekly after-care sessions.

"We look at recovery as an ongoing process," Wade says.
