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## National Eating Disorder Association and Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2007

### Learn About Eating Disorders and Awareness Week Events in Your Area

By **Christine Tetreault**

#### Why It Matters, How You Can Participate

"**Be comfortable in your genes. Wear jeans that fit the REAL you.**" That is the central theme for the National Eating Disorder Association's (NEDA) 20th annual Eating Disorder Awareness Week (EDAW). From February 25 - March 3, 2007, NEDA and other eating disorder support and advocacy groups nationwide, will go public to spread the frightening truth about eating disorders. In a very important technological first, NEDA this year takes EDAW to the web, through its own [myspace.neda](http://myspace.neda) page, inviting internet savvy youth to read and post stories, questions, and more on the NEDA eating disorder blog.

Poor body image and the endless cycle of dieting are things that many individuals struggle with at some point in their lives. For some, negative body image can trigger a downward spiral into unsafe dieting methods and unhealthy behaviors, resulting in a full blown eating disorder. For years, NEDA has promoted positive body image with its Great Jeans Giveaway, encouraging women - and more recently, men - to accept their real genes and their true body size by donating those never-to-be-worn-again too-small jeans.

Ongoing eating disorder research, highlighted on NEDA's web site ([www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)) continues to show that body size and shape are strongly influenced by biological factors. Influenced by polished fashion magazines, weight loss pills, and shelves of dieting books, many of us struggle against our natural, genetically-influenced size, determined to fit back into that pair of "skinny jeans." Fighting natural size and shape can lead to unhealthy dieting practices, poor body image, and sometimes to eating disorders. NEDA and research confirm that while each of us can work to adopt a healthy lifestyle and aim to be fit for our particular body type, we cannot change our genes.

NEDAW is the nation's largest eating disorder public awareness effort, focused on educating the public about healthy body image, the dangers of dieting, and where to find help -- all conducted by community volunteers. In spite of the genes vs. jeans word play, Eating Disorder Awareness Week offers a national forum to highlight what many still do not realize or believe -- that eating disorders are serious illnesses, **not** choices. A Newsweek cover story in 2006, reported ground-breaking research on the influence of genetics on eating disorders. In the Newsweek article, experts presented research results that showed that while environmental factors may 'pull the trigger, genetics loads the gun' for those who develop eating disorders.

During Eating Disorder Awareness Week, individuals are urged to accept their natural size and not to try and change their body to fit our culture's narrow standards of beauty. We want to help individuals base their self-worth on the strength of their character -- not the size of their jeans. As stated on its web site, NEDA works to help individuals base their self-worth on the strength of their character -- not the size of their jeans.

NEDA's web site includes many sobering facts about the prevalence and serious medical risk of eating disorders. Some of the more startling statistics follow here:

- Half of girls between ages of 12 and 14 say they feel fat.

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- The average fashion model is thinner than 98% of women in the U.S.

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- The average person sees 5,000 ads in one day and 1/3 of these ads speak directly to beauty and appearance.

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- Americans spend more than \$40 billion each year on diet related products.

- Most doctors and therapists report that the patients they are treating for eating disorders were on a diet at the time the eating disorder began.

To find Eating Disorder Awareness week events in your area, visit the NEDA EDAW event page at: [http://www.edap.org/p.asp?WebPage\\_ID=550](http://www.edap.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=550)

#### Takeaways

- ☞ Eating disorders are serious illnesses, not personal choices to avoid eating and lose weight.

- ☞ Be Comfortable in Your Genes -- throw out those too-small jeans, encourages NEDA.

- ☞ Negative body image and dieting can trigger an unhealthy downward spiral into a serious eating disorder.

### More resources

[http://www.edap.org/p.asp?WebPage\\_ID=550](http://www.edap.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=550) - visit for awareness weeks events in your area.

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