

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF EATING DISORDERS AND HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

Anorexia Nervosa is characterized by a disturbance in the way one sees his or her body and weight. Someone with anorexia has an intense fear of gaining weight, yet has already lost an unhealthy amount of weight. Women with anorexia may even have stopped having their periods.

Bulimia Nervosa is also characterized by an obsessive preoccupation with body size and by a fear of gaining weight. In addition, someone with bulimia engages in binge eating, that is, eats more than is normal within a certain time frame. The person then purges by fasting, vomiting, using laxatives, or exercising excessively to get rid of the consumed food.

Persons with anorexia or bulimia base their self-esteem on appearance, weight, and body shape/size. Eating disorders are mental illnesses with physical effects that usually affect adolescent girls and young women.

HOW COMMON ARE EATING DISORDERS?

- In the United States, about 5-10 percent of females and 1 percent of males struggle with an eating disorder.
- Of females, 1-2 percent have anorexia and 2-4 percent have bulimia (rates of bulimia are higher for women in college than for those who are younger, older, or not in college).
- About 80 percent of those with bulimia are women.
- Fifty-three percent of 13-year-old girls, 73 percent of 18-year-old girls, and 80 percent of adult women are unhappy with their bodies.
- The number-one goal of 11- to 17-year-old girls is to lose weight.
- Of individuals with anorexia, 5-20 percent will die.

SOURCES

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Zerbe K. (1995). Body Betrayed: A Deeper Understanding of Women, Eating Disorders and Treatment. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press.

MORE INFORMATION

<http://www.anad.org/>

<http://www.something-fishy.org/>

<http://www.mirror-mirror.org/eatdis.htm>

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P R E V E N T I O N

A W A R E N E S S

T R E A T M E N T



What You Should Know About

**EATING
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Do you or persons you know...

- have an intense fear of gaining weight?
- believe they are fat even though they are extremely thin?
- obsessively count calories and fat?
- eat very little or eat strange combinations of foods?
- avoid eating with others?
- exercise excessively, even in poor weather conditions?
- go to the bathroom immediately after eating?
- eat in secret or have large amounts of food disappear?



Someone who does these things may be struggling with an eating disorder.

What You Should Know About EATING DISORDERS

WHAT CAUSES AN EATING DISORDER?

Eating disorders have many causes. They can be the result of any combination of the following factors:

- **Psychological Factors.** The person may use dieting and food as a way to feel in control, soothe the self, strive for perfection, or distract the self from painful feelings or memories.
- **Interpersonal Factors.** Family conflict or unresolved family issues may contribute to the problem. Family members may be overly controlling or overly distant, or they may overvalue physical appearance.
- **Societal/Cultural Pressures.** Our society is one in which thinness is glorified, and the person may be influenced by media messages that convey that being thin equals success and happiness.
- **Frequent Dieting.** Sometimes an eating disorder develops if the individual diets continually over time.
- **Life Changes.** Eating disorders often develop during a time of change, such as the loss of a relationship through death or a breakup. Other changes include starting high school or moving away to college.
- **Biological/Biochemical Contribution.** There is some evidence that certain chemicals in the brain that control hunger, appetite, and digestion are imbalanced in persons with eating disorders.

- **Genetics.** Persons with eating disorders often have family members who also struggle with this condition.

WHAT KINDS OF PHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS CAN EATING DISORDERS CAUSE?

- Cardiac (heart) problems, with risk of heart failure
- Reduction of bone density, with risk of osteoporosis
- Severe dehydration, with risk of kidney failure
- Muscle loss and weakness
- Electrolyte imbalances, with risk of irregular heart beat and heart failure
- Gastric rupture as a result of bingeing
- Inflammation and rupture of the esophagus as well as tooth decay and gum disease from frequent vomiting
- Chronic irregular bowel movements and constipation from laxative use
- Loss of menstrual period and infertility
- Peptic ulcers and pancreatitis

**Both anorexia and bulimia are illnesses
that can be life threatening.**

HOW ARE EATING DISORDERS TREATED?

Eating disorders are most successfully treated when detected and treated early.

It is critical to first correct physical problems resulting from the eating disorder and to reestablish normal eating

patterns. In addition, because many individuals with eating disorders are depressed and/or anxious, medication may need to be prescribed to help the individual. For this reason, it is important to seek treatment from a physician and a dietitian.

It is also essential that the factors contributing to the eating disorder be examined and treated. For this reason, it is important to seek treatment from a mental health professional.

HOW CAN YOU HELP SOMEONE YOU THINK HAS AN EATING DISORDER?

- Learn as much as you can about eating disorders.
- Gently approach the individual and share concerns about the behaviors you have noticed.
- Consider sharing your concerns about the individual with his or her significant others so they can help; keeping an eating disorder a secret may be dangerous to the individual's health.
- Encourage the individual to seek professional help.
- Continue to be supportive and a good listener, encouraging the individual to express feelings.
- Remind the individual of the advantages of recovery and that others have achieved this.
- Realize that the individual's recovery is not your job and that change will not occur until he or she is ready.
- Avoid conflicts or battles of will.
- Avoid placing shame, blame, or guilt.
- Avoid making comments about the weight or shape of others because emphasizing appearance contributes to the problem.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF IF I THINK I HAVE AN EATING DISORDER?

- Consider contacting a mental health professional, dietitian, or physician.
- Reach out to a trusted friend or family member and express your feelings.
- Experiment with various relaxation techniques.
- Make time for having fun.
- Recognize your accomplishments that don't involve appearance.
- Never allow yourself to get so hungry that the urge to binge is overwhelming.
- Keep your day structured so boredom does not lead to a binge.
- Keep a food diary to learn what triggers you to fast, binge, and purge.
- Remove binge foods from your house and car.
- Every time you feel the need to binge, think about what feeling you are trying to avoid.
- When eating, only eat. Don't distract yourself with reading or watching TV at the same time.
- Make sure that eating is pleasurable. Eat on pleasant dishware, with a friend, or while playing relaxing music.



REMEMBER, RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE
AND HELP IS AVAILABLE.