



TAKECHARGE

WELCOA'S SELF-CARE BULLETIN

A CLOSER LOOK AT EATING DISORDERS

Many people mistakenly believe that eating disorders are a lifestyle choice. However, eating disorders are serious illnesses that are associated with severe disturbances in people's eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. Eating disorders can affect people of all ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, body weights, and genders. Eating disorders frequently appear during the teen years or young adulthood but may also develop during childhood or later in life. These disorders affect both genders, although rates among women are higher than among men.

Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. Here's a closer look at these illnesses and how to spot them.

ANOREXIA NERVOSA

People with anorexia nervosa may see themselves as overweight, even when they are dangerously underweight. People with anorexia nervosa typically weigh themselves repeatedly, severely restrict the amount of food they eat, often exercise excessively, and/or may force themselves to vomit or use laxatives to lose weight. Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental disorder. While many people with this disorder die from complications associated with starvation, others die of suicide.



Symptoms of anorexia nervosa include:

- » Extremely restricted eating
- » Extreme thinness (emaciation)
- » A relentless pursuit of thinness and unwillingness to maintain a normal or healthy weight
- » Intense fear of gaining weight
- » Distorted body image, a self-esteem that is heavily influenced by perceptions of body weight and shape, or a denial of the seriousness of low body weight

Other symptoms may develop over time, including:

- » Thinning of the bones (osteopenia or osteoporosis)
- » Mild anemia and muscle wasting and weakness
- » Brittle hair and nails
- » Dry and yellowish skin

- » Growth of fine hair all over the body (lanugo)
- » Severe constipation
- » Low blood pressure slowed breathing and pulse
- » Damage to the structure and function of the heart
- » Brain damage
- » Drop in internal body temperature, causing a person to feel cold all the time
- » Infertility

BULIMIA NERVOSA

People with bulimia nervosa have recurrent and frequent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food and feeling a lack of control over these episodes. This binge-eating is followed by behavior that compensates for the overeating such as forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviors.

Symptoms of bulimia include:

- » Chronically inflamed and sore throat
- » Swollen salivary glands in the neck and jaw area
- » Worn tooth enamel and increasingly sensitive and decaying teeth as a result of exposure to stomach acid
- » Acid reflux disorder and other gastrointestinal problems
- » Intestinal distress and irritation from laxative abuse
- » Severe dehydration from purging of fluids

BINGE-EATING DISORDER

People with binge-eating disorder lose control over his or her eating. Unlike bulimia nervosa, periods of binge-eating are not followed by purging, excessive exercise, or fasting. As a result, people with binge-eating disorder often are overweight or obese. Binge-eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the U.S.



Symptoms of binge eating disorder include:

- » Eating unusually large amounts of food in a specific amount of time, such as a 2-hour period
- » Eating even when you're full or not hungry
- » Eating fast during binge episodes
- » Eating until you're uncomfortably full
- » Eating alone or in secret to avoid embarrassment
- » Feeling distressed, ashamed, or guilty about your eating
- » Frequently dieting, possibly without weight loss

TREATMENTS

It is important to seek treatment early for eating disorders. People with eating disorders are at higher risk for suicide and medical complications. Complete recovery is possible, though. Treatment plans are tailored to individual needs and may include one or more of the following:

- » Individual, group, and/or family psychotherapy
- » Medical care and monitoring
- » Nutritional counseling
- » Medications