



What is an Eating Disorder? Some Basic Facts

Eating disorders -- such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder -- include extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding weight and food issues. Eating disorders are serious emotional and physical problems that can have life-threatening consequences for females and males.

ANOREXIA NERVOSA is characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss.

Symptoms include:

- Refusal to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for height, body type, age, and activity level
- Intense fear of weight gain or being “fat”
- Feeling “fat” or overweight despite dramatic weight loss
- Loss of menstrual periods
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape

BULIMIA NERVOSA is characterized by a secretive cycle of binge eating followed by purging. Bulimia includes eating large amounts of food--more than most people would eat in one meal-- in short periods of time, then getting rid of the food and calories through vomiting, laxative abuse, or over-exercising.

Symptoms include:

- Repeated episodes of bingeing and purging
- Feeling out of control during a binge and eating beyond the point of comfortable fullness
- Purging after a binge, (typically by self-induced vomiting, abuse of laxatives, diet pills and/or diuretics, excessive exercise, or fasting)
- Frequent dieting
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape

BINGE EATING DISORDER (also known as COMPULSIVE OVEREATING) is characterized primarily by periods of uncontrolled, impulsive, or continuous eating beyond the point of feeling comfortably full. While there is no purging, there may be sporadic fasts or repetitive diets and often feelings of shame or self-hatred after a binge. People who overeat compulsively may struggle with anxiety, depression, and loneliness, which can contribute to their unhealthy episodes of binge eating. Body weight may vary from normal to mild, moderate, or severe obesity.

OTHER EATING DISORDERS can include some combination of the signs and symptoms of anorexia, bulimia, and/or binge eating disorder. While these behaviors may not be clinically considered a full syndrome eating disorder, they can still be physically dangerous and emotionally draining.

Remember that you cannot force someone to seek help, change their habits, or adjust their attitudes. You will make important progress in honestly sharing your concerns, providing support, and knowing where to go for more information! People struggling with anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge eating disorder do need professional help. There is help available and there is hope!