

Eating Disorders in Youth

Eating disorders are real and serious illnesses that can sometimes be life threatening. They are also very common. Each year more than five million Americans have an eating disorder. Most of these individuals are teens and young adult women, but eating disorders are also common among gay men, victims of sexual abuse and male athletes who are involved in sports with weight classes.

The major types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia, and binge eating disorder. It is very likely that you know someone who has an eating disorder. Learning how to identify these disorders can help you to help yourself or a friend with an eating disorder. With treatment, people do get better and can return to their everyday lives.

Anorexia Nervosa

People who intentionally starve themselves have an eating disorder called anorexia nervosa. The disorder, which usually begins in young people around the time of puberty, involves extreme weight loss – at least 15 percent below the individual’s normal body weight. Many people with this disorder look extremely thin but are convinced they are overweight. Sometimes they must be hospitalized to prevent starvation. One in ten cases of anorexia nervosa leads to death from starvation, cardiac arrest, other medical complications, or suicide.

Warning signs of Anorexia Nervosa

A person may ...

- Not eat enough
- Feel “fat” even when he or she is very thin
- Always feel cold and tired
- Exercise vigorously and at odd hours
- Have lost a significant amount of weight recently
- Be very particular about counting calories and avoiding certain foods
- Categorize foods into “good” and “bad” foods
- Weigh themselves several times a day

Bulimia Nervosa

People with bulimia nervosa consume large amounts of food and then rid their bodies of the excess calories by vomiting, abusing laxatives or diuretics, taking enemas, or exercising obsessively. Some use a combination of all these forms of purging. Because many individuals with bulimia “binge and purge” in secret and maintain normal or above normal body weight, they can often successfully hide their problem for years.

Warning signs of Bulimia Nervosa

A person may...

- Eat a lot of food quickly, then get rid of it by purging – vomiting or misusing laxatives or diuretics
- Gain and lose weight often
- Have irregular menstrual periods
- Starve himself or herself after eating instead of purging
- Express guilt before, during and/or after eating

Binge Eating Disorder

An illness that resembles bulimia nervosa is binge eating disorder. Like bulimia, this disorder is characterized by episodes of uncontrolled eating or bingeing. However, binge eating disorder differs from bulimia because its sufferers do not purge their bodies of excess food. In contrast to other eating disorders, one third to one fourth of all patients with binge eating disorders are men.

Warning signs of Binge Eating Disorder

- Not able to stop eating even when full
- Become obese or gain weight rapidly
- Eat a lot of food in a short time without purging afterwards

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.

Eating Disorders Center of Denver (303) 771-0861

National Eating Disorders Organization (918) 481-4044

Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. (541) 334-1144 www.anred.com

Resources for this fact sheet are from the National Mental Health Association and the Eating Disorders Center of Denver.