

EATING DISORDERS—WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Did you know? Per the National Eating Disorders Association, approximately 30 million people in the United States will be affected by an eating disorder during their lifetime.



In today's society, unrealistic standards of beauty and weight are widely advertised through the media. This negative information can result in pressure for unhealthy weight management, causing eating disorders. These disorders have devastating effects on mental and physical health and can affect anyone.

Definition & Causes

An eating disorder is a condition that negatively affects eating or eating patterns. Societal or mental aspects, as well as physical causes, can lead to the development of an eating disorder. Examples of these factors are social pressures, depression, certain medications, and other disease states.

Different Types

There are several types of eating disorders. Each type can be associated with different behaviors and symptoms. Examples of these disorders can include, but are not limited to:

- Binge eating (eating large amounts of food at once)
- Cachexia (cancer-induced loss of appetite)

Two of the most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

Anorexia Nervosa (anorexia)

This type of eating disorder results in serious, unhealthy weight loss. The weight loss can be due to restricting calories, skipping meals, or refusing to eat. Many people who are anorexic believe that they are overweight, even when they are severely underweight. Most often, those who are anorexic will weigh themselves a lot.

Bulimia Nervosa (bulimia)

Similar to anorexia, bulimia can also result in unhealthy weight loss. However, those who are bulimic will binge eat and then purge to offset the amount of calories consumed. The act of purging can include vomiting, fasting, or abusing laxatives. Although many people who are bulimic are within a normal weight range, they still maintain their weight in unhealthy ways.

Warning Signs & Symptoms

Many eating disorders have similar signs and symptoms. These can include concentration problems, decreased energy, fatigue, and shortness of breath. The table below lists signs and symptoms that relate to anorexia or bulimia.

| <i>DISORDER</i> | <i>SIGNS & SYMPTOMS</i> |
|-----------------|--|
| Anorexia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-starvation & unusual weight loss • Unnecessary physical exercise • Irregular or missed periods (in females) |
| Bulimia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binge eating followed with vomiting • Denial of hunger • Swollen salivary glands |

Health Effects

Eating disorders have both mental and physical consequences on the body. Health effects caused by anorexia or bulimia are listed here.

| <i>DISORDER</i> | <i>HEALTH EFFECTS</i> |
|-----------------|--|
| Anorexia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle loss & weakness • Dehydration, dry hair & skin • Slow heart rate & low blood pressure |
| Bulimia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tooth decay & staining • Stomach or esophagus rupture • Abnormal bowel movements & constipation |

Prevention & Treatment

Eating disorders are treatable. Treatment options for these disorders focus on both the causes and symptoms of the condition. Treatment must also be specific to the individual. Counseling or therapy can be an effective option in treating disorders caused by mental or social aspects. Medication and nutritional needs can also be used to treat the physical damage from the condition.

Remember, it is important to seek help from a medical professional when treating any eating disorder.

