



Teen Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are extreme expressions of food and weight issues experienced by many individuals, particularly girls and women. They include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating. Eating disorders are serious emotional and physical problems that can result in life-threatening consequences.

Those with eating disorders can do major damage to their bodies. Reducing food intake leaves one feeling nauseated, dizzy, and irritable. It can cause dry hair and skin, even osteoporosis — a disease of the bones. Many women stop having menstrual cycles. Heart problems and other life threatening complications can occur.

Yet the physical problems are only half the story. The emotional problems can be serious too. An unhealthy attitude about food and body image is the main issue. Some use food to make themselves feel better; others stop eating to feel like they are “in control” of their life. Both behaviors leave people feeling bad about what they are eating. And worst of all, the more people begin to obsess over what they are eating (or not eating), the less they care about other things—like school, friends, or other activities.



Bulimia Nervosa

This disorder is characterized by a secretive cycle of binge eating followed by purging. Bulimia includes eating large amounts of food in short periods of time. This is called a binge. As a result, they purge the food they have eaten by making themselves vomit. Sometimes they also use laxatives, excess exercise and restricting their diet.

Signs and Symptoms

- Repeated episodes of bingeing and purging
- Sneaking food
- Making excuses to go to the bathroom after meals
- Eating large amounts of food on the spur of the moment
- Taking laxatives or diet pills, vomiting, and/or over exercising to “purge” food
- Extreme concern with body weight and image
- Enamel on teeth begins to wear away,

causing cavities

Anorexia Nervosa

This illness is characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss for *the relentless pursuit of thinness*.

Signs and Symptoms

- Missing periods
- Refusal to maintain a minimally normal weight for age and height
- Intense fear of gaining weight, even though under weight
- Misuse of laxatives, diuretics, ipecac syrup, or enemas
- Feeling “fat” despite dramatic weight loss
- Restriction of food intake or denying hunger
- Feeling moody
- Over exercising

Binge Eating Disorder

Also known as compulsive eating, binge eating disorder is characterized primarily by periods of uncontrolled, impulsive or continuous eating beyond the point of feeling comfortably full. When someone is bingeing, he or she usually doesn't have much control over how much is eaten. Binge eating is different from anorexia and bulimia because people do not regularly vomit, over exercise, or abuse laxatives after they have eaten. People who overeat compulsively may struggle with anxiety, depression and loneliness. Body weight of binge eaters can be normal to severely obese.

(Resources: National Eating Disorder Association - www.nationaleatingdisorders.org; U.S. Department of Health Human Services - www.girlpower.gov)