

EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders are often described as an outward expression of internal emotional pain and confusion. Obsessive thoughts about, and the behaviour associated with, food are means of dealing with emotional distress which cannot be expressed in any other satisfactory way. The emotional distress is often to do with a negative perception of self, a feeling of being unable to change "bad" things about oneself: food is used as an inappropriate way of taking control.

An eating disorder involves a distorted pattern of thinking about food and size/weight: there is a preoccupation and obsession with food. Most people who develop an eating disorder are between the ages of 14 and 18 although they can develop even earlier in some people.

CAUSES

What causes eating disorders is not entirely clear, though a combination of psychological, genetic, social and family factors are thought to contribute to the disorder.

Individuals who have a close relative with an eating disorder have an increased risk for also developing an eating disorder. Sometimes, problems at home, such as drug or alcohol abuse, can put a child at higher risk to develop disordered eating behaviors. Frequently a person who develops an eating disorder has a low self-esteem, depression, has the feelings of lack of control in his life and often the focus on weight is an attempt to regain sense of control.

Some research suggests that media images contribute to the rise in the incidence of eating disorders. Most women in advertising, movies, TV, and sports programs are very thin, and this may lead girls to think that the ideal of beauty is thinness.

TYPES

The most known disorders are anorexia, bulimia, compulsive eating disorder, binge eating disorder and obesity.

- **Anorexia** is a serious, life-threatening disorder, which usually stems from underlying emotional causes. Although people with anorexia are obsessed with food, they continually deny their hunger. They often also limit or restrict other parts of their lives besides food, including relationships, social activities, or pleasure. Anorexia nervosa can cause severe medical problems and even lead to death. The disorder involves extreme weight loss at least 15% below the individual's "ideal" weight and a refusal to maintain body weight that is even minimally normal for their age and height and body frame.
- **Bulimia** is also disorder that can be fatal if left untreated. People who have bulimia routinely "binge," consuming large amounts of food in a very short period of time, and immediately "purge," ridding their bodies of the just-eaten food by self-inducing vomiting, taking enemas, or abusing laxatives or other

medications. If left untreated, bulimia nervosa can lead to serious and even life-threatening problems. Those with bulimia nervosa are at risk for dangerous impulsive, self-destructive behaviors, such as kleptomania, self-mutilation, alcohol and/or drug abuse, and sexual promiscuity.

- People with **compulsive overeating disorder** suffer from episodes of uncontrolled eating or bingeing followed by periods of guilt and depression. Compulsive overeating is marked by the consumption of large amounts of food. This disorder may cause a person to continue to eat even after they become uncomfortably full.
- The essential features of **binge-eating disorder** are recurrent, out-of-control episodes of consuming abnormally large amounts of food. If you suffer from this disorder you eat whether you are hungry or not and consume food well past being uncomfortably full. Binge-eaters are usually extremely distressed by their eating behavior and experience feelings of disgust and guilt both during and after bingeing.
- **Obesity** disorder is when person weighs 25% or more over ideal body weight. This is one of today's most critical health problem; each year, hundreds of thousands of people are affected by serious and sometimes life-threatening mental and physical complications as a direct consequence of their obesity. Appropriate treatment not only improves individuals' quality of life, it can save lives.

SYMPTOMS and SIGNS

The most common warning signs that indicate that a person may be suffering from anorexia are the person: Is thin and keeps getting thinner, losing 15% or more of her ideal body weight, continues to diet or restrict foods even though she is not overweight, has a distorted body image—feels fat even when she is thin, a person exercises obsessively

And warning symptoms for bulimia are frequent fluctuations in weight, Use of the bathroom frequently after meals, feeling guilty or ashamed about eating, can be depressive or has mood swings

Compulsive Overeating and binge eating disorders signs are that they eat large amounts of food when not physically hungry, eat much more rapidly than normal, eats until the point of feeling uncomfortably full or even longer and they often eat alone because of shame or embarrassment

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Eating disorders can kill! And people who have eating disorders must get professional help. Families and friends of eating disordered patients often do not realize the extent to which eating disorders can create serious physical problems. Some of the more common medical consequences of eating disorders are easily recognizable and with early detection can be managed to prevent serious medical complications requiring hospitalization.

The most common effects are:

- Hypomagnesemia – a magnesium deficiency
- Hypocalcemia – a calcium deficiency
- Dehydration
- Malnutrition
- Low Blood Pressure
- Low Heart Rate
- Heart Failure
- Esophageal Damage (leading to possible rupture) – this usually happens quickly and is very dangerous
- Impacted bowels
- Osteoporosis
- Heart Arrhythmia
- Dental Problems

They also risk developing serious mental disorders, such as depression, personality disorders, or anxiety disorders

TREATMENT

All eating disorders must be treated and the longer someone waits the longer the treatment is. Often there are relapses and success comes only after trying several therapeutic approaches. Because both the mind and body are involved in this disorders, medical doctors, mental health professionals, and dietitians will often be involved in a person's treatment and recovery. Therapy or counseling is a critical part of treating eating disorders in many cases, family therapy is one of the keys to eating healthily again. Parents and other family members are important in helping a person see that his or her normal body shape is perfectly fine and that being thin doesn't make anyone happy. They are also prescribed antidepressants and are counseled how to learn good nutritional habits.