



UNDERSTANDING EATING DISORDERS

- 1 in 5 women struggle with an eating disorder or disordered eating
- Eating disorders affect up to 24 million Americans and 70 million individuals worldwide
- An estimated 10-15% of people with anorexia or bulimia are male
- 90% of those who have eating disorders are females between the ages of 12 and 15
- At least 50,000 individuals will die as a direct result of an eating disorder
- It is estimated that currently 11% of high school students have been diagnosed with an eating disorder
- 15% of young women in the U.S. who are not diagnosed with an eating disorder display substantially disordered eating attitudes and behaviors
- A study conducted by Cornell University found that 40% of male football players surveyed engaged in some sort of disordered eating behavior
- The most common behavior that will lead to an eating disorder is dieting
- 42% of 1st through 3rd graders want to be thinner
- 81% of ten year-olds are afraid of being fat. 51% of 9 and 10 year-old girls feel better about themselves if they are on a diet
- Anorexia is the 3rd most common chronic illness among adolescents
(eatingdisorderinfo.org)

What Are Eating Disorders?

Eating disorders are defined by extreme behaviors. Those behaviors could include extreme reduction of food intake, or extreme overeating. There may be extreme distress or concern about body weight or shape.

No one starts out eating disordered. Behaviors may have shifted into simply eating larger or smaller amounts of food than usual—which at some point then spirals out of control. Eating disorders are difficult to understand, and despite a significant amount of research, we are still not certain what causes the shift into disordered eating.

There are three types of eating disorders. You have probably heard of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (commonly called “anorexia” and “bulimia”). The third category is called “eating disorder not otherwise specified (or EDNOS). Binge-eating disorder is considered an example of EDNOS, as well as other disorders which are very similar to anorexia and bulimia.



Anorexia nervosa is characterized by emaciation, unwillingness to maintain normal weight, distorted body image, strong fear of gaining weight, lack of menstruation for females, and extremely disturbed eating behavior. Some of these behaviors include dieting and exercising excessively; self-inducing vomiting; and abusing laxatives, diuretics, or enemas. Physical symptoms of anorexia can include: thinning bones, brittle hair and nails, dry/yellowish skin, mild anemia, muscle weakness/loss, severe constipation, low blood pressure, drop in internal body temperature (person feels cold all of the time), and lethargy.

Bulimia Nervosa is characterized by recurrent and frequent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food, and feeling a lack of control over the eating. The binge-eating is followed by a type of behavior that compensates for the binge, such as the behaviors mentioned above in connection with anorexia. The main difference between bulimia and anorexia is that anorectics will fall within the normal weight range for their age. Like those with anorexia, bulimics are very unhappy with their bodies. They are often ashamed of their weight-loss behaviors and will keep them secret.

Physical symptoms of bulimia can include: chronically-inflamed and sore throat, worn tooth enamel and increasingly sensitive and decaying teeth (due to exposure to stomach acids), gastroesophageal reflux disorder, intestinal distress (from laxative abuse), kidney problems (from diuretic abuse), and severe dehydration from purging of fluids.

Eating disorders often appear in adolescence or young adulthood; however, they can also develop earlier or later in life. Women and girls are more likely to develop an eating disorder, although one in four preadolescent cases of anorexia occurs in boys, and binge-eating disorder affects both genders about equally.

Eating disorders are treatable medical illnesses with complex underlying psychological and biological causes. They frequent occur along with other disorders such as depression, substance abuse, or anxiety disorders.

What Can I do if I Have an Eating Disorder?

Treating anorexia involves:

- 1) restoring the person to a healthy weight;
- 2) treating the psychological issues related to the eating disorder
- 3) reducing or eliminating behaviors or thoughts that lead to disordered eating, and preventing relapse



Medications such as antidepressants may be somewhat effective in treating anorexia to reduce co-existing depression, anxiety, etc. Different forms of psychotherapy, including individual, group, and family therapy, can help address the psychological reasons for the illness. It is important, especially in the early stages of treatment (while restoring patient to a healthy weight) that a medical doctor be a part of the treatment group.

Treating bulimia is similar to treating anorexia. Treatment may include nutritional counseling, psychotherapy, and antidepressant medications.

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Sources

<http://www.eatingdisorderinfo.org/Resources/EatingDisordersStatistics/tabid/964/Default.aspx>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders/complete-index.shtml>