

Introduction

Eating disorders are illnesses that cause serious changes in a person's daily diet. This can include not eating enough food or overeating.

Eating disorders affect about 70 million individuals worldwide. The majority of people with an eating disorder are women. Getting help early for an eating disorder is important to prevent complications. Eating disorders can cause serious health problems.

This reference summary will help you understand three eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder. It also discusses possible causes, complications and treatment options for eating disorders.



Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are a serious medical problem. People with an eating disorder may use food to try to control overwhelming feelings. They may also have obsessions about body weight or shape.

Eating disorders are real, treatable medical illnesses. They often develop with other illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse or obsessive behaviors. Often people with eating disorders feel ashamed and may become depressed. They may avoid their friends and family and miss social events.



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Eating disorders are serious and can become life-threatening if a person doesn't receive treatment. Some eating disorders can affect the heart, brain and other important organs.

There are three common eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder. The following sections will examine each of these a bit more closely.

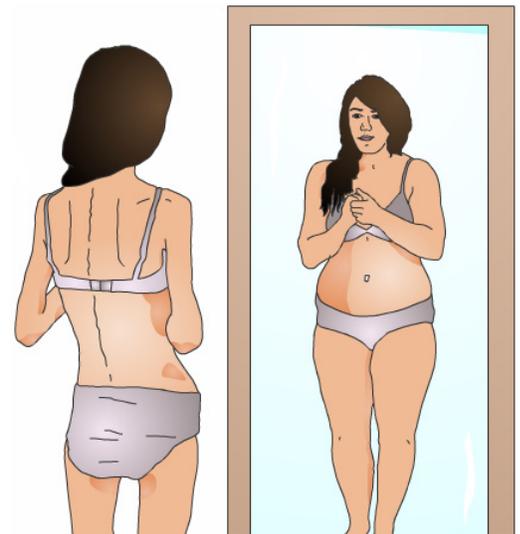
Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is often just called anorexia. People with anorexia nervosa see themselves as overweight, even when they are clearly underweight. Eating, food and weight control become obsessions.

People with anorexia nervosa typically weigh themselves repeatedly, portion food carefully, and eat very small quantities of only certain foods. Some people with anorexia nervosa may also engage in binge-eating followed by extreme dieting, excessive exercise, self-induced vomiting or misuse of drugs that aid in weight loss.

A person with anorexia:

- Has a low body weight for his or her height.
- Has a strong fear of gaining weight.
- Thinks he or she is fat when in reality he or she is very thin.
- Resists keeping a healthy body weight.



People with anorexia look very thin. They may use extreme measures to lose weight such as:

- Exercising when they are tired or until their body hurts.
- Making themselves throw up.
- Not eating or eating very little.
- Taking diet pills.

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People with anorexia are at higher risk for issues with the heart or brain and problems with physical development. Anorexia affects the whole body because the body isn't getting the energy it needs from food.

Anorexia may also lead to:

- Anemia.
- Inability to become pregnant or have a baby.
- Low blood pressure and slow pulse.

Anemia is a condition in which your blood does not have enough red blood cells to carry enough oxygen to the rest of your body.

Anorexia may also lead to:

- Multi-organ failure.
- Muscle wasting and weakness.
- Osteoporosis or fragile bones.

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia nervosa is when a person has repeated and frequent episodes of eating large amounts of food and feels a lack of control over these episodes. This binge-eating is followed by forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise or a combination of these behaviors.

Unlike anorexia nervosa, people with bulimia nervosa usually keep a healthy or normal weight, while some are slightly overweight. But like people with anorexia nervosa, they often fear gaining weight, want desperately to lose weight, and are intensely unhappy with their body size and shape.



Someone with bulimia may use extreme measures to lose weight by:

- Exercising when tired.
- Going to the bathroom right after eating to throw up.
- Using diet pills, diuretics or laxatives.

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Diuretics are drugs that increase the production of urine, causing a person to need to go to the bathroom more often. Laxatives are drugs that cause bowel movements.

Someone with bulimia may also show signs of throwing up a lot, including:

- Broken blood vessels in the eyes, caused by a person retching and vomiting forcibly.
- Calluses or scrapes on knuckles if using fingers to induce vomiting.
- Swollen cheeks or jaw area.
- Teeth that look clear due to damages from the stomach acid found in vomit.

People with bulimia are at higher risk for issues with the heart or brain and problems with physical development. Bulimia nervosa affects the whole body because the body isn't getting the energy it needs from food.

Bulimia can eventually cause:

- Digestive system problems like ulcers.
- Electrolyte imbalance, which can lead to heart attacks.
- Sensitive and decaying teeth.
- Severe dehydration.



Electrolyte imbalance happens when the levels of sodium, calcium, potassium and other minerals are either too high or too low.

Binge-Eating Disorder

People with binge-eating disorder often eat an unusually large amount of food. They commonly feel out of control during these binges. Binge-eaters are often overweight or obese. Unlike bulimia or anorexia, binge-eaters don't throw up their food and don't exercise a lot.

People with binge-eating disorder may:

- Continue to eat after they feel full.
- Eat alone because of embarrassment.
- Eat more quickly than usual during binge episodes.



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- Eat when they aren't hungry.
- Feel depressed or guilty after overeating.

The guilt and shame that people with binge-eating disorder experience after an episode often leads to more binge-eating.

People with binge-eating disorder are often obese. This raises the risk for:

- Certain types of cancer.
- Heart disease.
- High blood pressure.

Obesity can raise the risk for:

- High cholesterol.
- Gallbladder disease.
- Type 2 diabetes.



Causes

Researchers are finding that eating disorders are caused by a complex interaction of genetic, biological, behavioral, psychological and social factors.

Women are more likely than men to have eating disorders. Also, eating disorders usually start during the teenage years. Eating disorders often happen along with other mental problems like depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. People with eating disorders often feel helpless and worthless.

Stressful events or life changes may also affect how healthy a person eats. Traumatic events may lead to the onset of eating disorders. An eating disorder may develop due to family environment as well. A parent's attitude about appearance and diet can affect their children. Also, a person is more likely to develop an eating disorder if someone else in their family has it too.



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Treatment

Treatment for eating disorders usually involves a team of nutritionists, therapists and other health care providers. They will help the person to:

- Cope with stress and feelings.
- Learn healthy eating patterns.

One goal of treatment is to help bring the person back to a normal weight. Another goal is to treat any psychological issues related to or causing the eating disorder. This is to prevent relapse, or getting sick again.

Treatment for eating disorders usually involves medicines and psychotherapy.

Medicines may include antidepressants, antipsychotics or mood stabilizers to treat anorexia. Medications that either stimulate or reduce the appetite may be used depending on the eating disorder. There are many different kinds of therapy available to treat eating disorders. Therapy may be done in groups, one-on-one or even as a family.



Nutritional advice is also a part of treating eating disorders. Knowing how to eat healthy is important in maintaining a healthy body weight and image.

Summary

Eating disorders are a serious medical problem. People with an eating disorder may use food to feel control over feelings that seem overwhelming. These people may also have obsessions about body weight or shape.

Eating disorders are treatable medical illnesses. Eating disorders are serious and can become life-threatening if a person doesn't receive treatment.

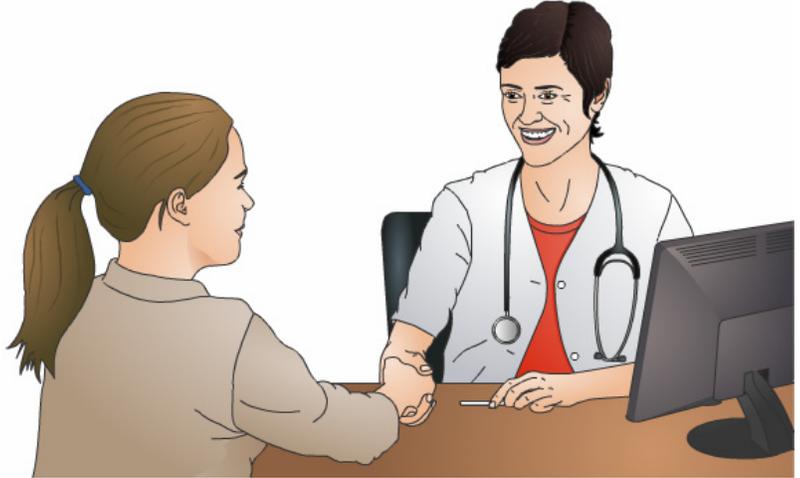
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People with binge-eating disorder often eat an unusually large amount of food. They commonly feel out of control during these binges. Binge-eaters are often overweight or obese.

Treatment for eating disorders uses a combination of options. These usually involve medicines, therapy and nutritional advice. Eating disorders can cause serious health problems. Getting help early for an eating disorder is important to prevent complications.



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