

# EATING DISORDERS...

## What's Going On?

Eating disorders are a condition where a person feels controlled by food and negative feelings about their body. The act of eating becomes an emotional struggle as the person views food as the enemy. Once thought to be a problem affecting a small portion of wealthy white girls, eating disorders are much more common today. Both males and females, in all social and economic classes, are developing problems with eating, poor self esteem and body image. Current research has found that over 30 million people, males and females of all ages, struggle with some form of disordered eating and eating disorders.

### EATING DISORDERS, DEFINED

There are four types of eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and eating disorder not otherwise specified. They are a treatable mental disorder and are likely caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors.

### ANOREXIA NERVOSA

Anorexia is a disorder where a person is afraid of gaining weight, refuses to eat an adequate amount of food, refuses to achieve or maintain a healthy weight, sees their body as fat even though they aren't, and, in females, stopped or never started menstruating. People with anorexia are terrified of being fat, eat a limited variety of foods and feel guilty if they eat or are unable to exercise. In spite of being underweight and being fearful of eating, they obsess about food and meals. Restricting food intake often gives a sense of control in a stressful environment.

### BULIMIA NERVOSA

Bulimia is a disorder where a person is afraid of gaining weight, has poor body image, eats large amounts of food and then uses dangerous methods such as vomiting or excessive exercise to rid the calories and prevent weight gain. The person feels out of control with eating, especially when they binge. People with bulimia are terrified of becoming fat and often diet to try and lose weight. They obsess about food and meals and often feel ashamed about their behaviors. Purging often gives the person a sense of control over the uncontrolled bingeing behaviors.

### BINGE EATING DISORDER

Binge eating is a disorder where a person eats large amounts of food but, contrary to bulimia nervosa, the person does not do anything to compensate for the food intake. The person feels out of control when they are overeating, eats more rapidly than normal, and will overeat even when not physically hungry. A person with binge eating disorder feels shame and guilt about their behaviors. Binge eating is often a way to cope with uncomfortable emotions in an attempt to feel better.

### EATING DISORDER NOT OTHERWISE SPECIFIED

EDNOS is a recently recognized disorder and is a condition where a person meets most, but not all, the criteria for anorexia or bulimia nervosa. A person with this disorder is terrified of gaining weight, obsesses about food, diets frequently, but may still have regular menses or may not be underweight. They may purge, but they may not binge or they participate in these behaviors less frequently than with bulimia nervosa.

### THE COMMON THREAD...

In all of these eating disorders, the obsession with food and weight, poor self esteem, and poor body image negatively impact the quality of life. It becomes difficult for the person to function without worrying about what they are going to eat, how they can hide their behaviors, how they can get rid of the calories they ingested, and what they look like. Food begins to control their daily life, dominates their thoughts and behaviors, and interferes with their happiness.

If you recognize any of these issues in yourself or a loved one, there may be an eating disorder present.

## WHY IS THERE A PROBLEM?

Eating disorders are multifaceted—meaning there are many reasons contributing to the development of the disordered eating. Some causative factors include family and peer pressures, life stress, media images, and genetics.

Disordered eating can develop when someone diets and becomes fearful of regaining lost weight. Eating problems can also develop when someone is teased because of being overweight, or is complimented for losing weight. When someone feels they are judged because of their physical appearance, poor self-esteem can result.

Eating disorders are a way to control—when someone feels their life is stressful, eating or not eating is a way to control their emotions. In addition, eating disorders can be a way to gain attention or rebel. Scientists are now discovering that there may be a genetic link with anorexia and bulimia.

## WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

Eating disorders significantly affect a person's physical and emotional well being.

Physical complications include:

- Irregular Heartbeat
- Electrolyte Imbalances
- Decreased Resistance to Infections
- Anemia
- Decreased Metabolism
- Hair Loss
- Kidney Problems
- Sleeping Problems
- Osteoporosis
- Irregular or Stopping of Menses
- Dehydration
- Muscle Wasting
- Death

Psychological complications include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Intense Preoccupation with Food
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Irritability
- Mood Swings
- Food Phobias
- Decreased Social Interactions
- Learning Problems

## WHAT IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP?

If you or someone you care about is suffering with disordered eating or an eating disorder, it is important to get a medical, psychological, and nutritional evaluation. These professionals will help identify the complications from under or overeating.

A physician will monitor your physical status and make sure you are medically safe. A therapist will help you work through the emotional issues that contribute to the eating problem. A nutritionist who specializes in eating disorders will help you regain control of your eating, normalize eating behaviors, and correct the malnutrition associated with disordered eating and eating disorders.

Accepting support from others is essential for recovering from disordered eating and eating disorders. Speak with someone you trust such as a parent, counselor, or friend and ask for their support in helping you seek treatment. Talking to a trained professional is the first step toward developing a healthy relationship with food, eating and your body.

## IS THERE A PROBLEM?

### DO YOU:

- Feel guilty after you eat?
- Constantly worry about how you look?
- Avoid eating certain foods, even if you like them because you think they'll make you gain weight?
- Avoid eating with others so they don't see how much or how little you eat?
- Spend a lot of time thinking about food?
- Feel guilty if you are not able to exercise?
- Experience mood swings, especially when around food or planning meals?
- Frequently become irritable?
- Notice a change in your menstrual cycle?
- Feel like food and eating is controlling your life?

*If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have an eating problem. Speaking with a professional trained in eating disorders can help you understand what is going on what you can do to overcome the struggle with food and eating*