

# Eating Disorders



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS [www.namihelps.org](http://www.namihelps.org)

When someone becomes so obsessed with food and weight that they find it hard to focus on other parts of their life, it may be a sign of an eating disorder. Without treatment, eating disorders can take over a person's life and lead to serious health conditions, even death.

## What are the symptoms?

Eating disorders are conditions that cause serious emotional and physical problems. Each condition involves food and weight issues, and every person will experience their eating disorder differently.

- **Anorexia Nervosa.** A person with anorexia will not eat to the point of starving. This can cause loss of period, constipation, stomach pain, irregular heartbeats, low blood pressure, dehydration and trouble sleeping.
- **Bulimia Nervosa.** Someone living with bulimia will feel out of control when bingeing on very large amounts of food during short periods of time. They will later use throw up or over exercising to feel in control again. This cycle has a very negative effect both emotionally and physically. The emotional signs of bulimia are low self-esteem, feeling guilty or shameful about eating, and isolation from friends and family
- **Binge Eating Disorder (BED).** A person with BED eats a very large amount of food in a short period of time. They may also eat even when they are not hungry or after they are uncomfortably full. A person with BED, after an episode of binge eating, does not attempt to purge or exercise excessively like someone living with anorexia or bulimia would.

## What are the causes?

Eating disorders are complicated. There are many reasons why someone develops an eating disorder.

- **Family History.** Studies suggest that eating disorders can run in families.
- **Environment.** Cultural pressures that stress "thinness" or "being muscular" as beautiful places pressure on people of achieve unrealistic standards.
- **Peer Pressure.** Pressure can include bullying because of size or weight.
- **Abuse.** A history of physical or sexual abuse can cause some to develop an eating disorder.
- **Emotional Health.** Some experts believe that an eating disorder is caused by people trying to cope with overwhelming feelings and painful emotions. Low self-esteem and perfectionism may also be a reason.

## **Risk Factors**

Eating disorders affect all types of people. But there are certain factors that put some people at greater risk.

- **Age.** Eating disorders are more common during teens and early 20s.
- **Gender.** Women and girls are more likely to have a diagnosed eating disorder. However, men and boys may be under-diagnosed.
- **Family history.** Having a family member with an eating disorder increases the risk.
- **Dieting.** Dieting taken too far can become an eating disorder.
- **Transitions.** Times of change like going to college or getting divorced may be a stressor.
- **Vocations and Activities.** Eating disorders are especially common among gymnasts, runners, wrestlers, and dancers.

## **Diagnosis**

An early diagnosis is important for recovery. If an eating disorder is believed to be an issue, a doctor will usually perform a physical examination, an interview, and order lab tests. A mental health professional will perform a psychological evaluation.

## **Treatment**

Treatments will vary depending on the type of disorder, but will generally include the following:

- **Therapy**, such as talk therapy or behavioral therapy.
- **Medicine**, such as antidepressants and anti-anxiety.
- **Nutritional counseling**, with the goal of developing healthy eating patterns.
- **Weight monitoring**, to track progress towards healthy weight.
- **Family based treatment**, to increase awareness and support at home.