

WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

- Eating disorders in children and adolescents are serious but treatable illnesses that can have life-threatening physical consequences.
- Those who suffer from an eating disorder often become obsessed with body image, food, and/or weight.
- Eating disorders can affect people of all ages, genders, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, races, sexual orientations, body shapes, and weights.
- There is no single known cause for eating disorders.
- Growing research suggests a combination of biological, psychological and sociocultural factors contribute to the development of an eating disorder.
- Early detection and intervention of eating disorders is important in order to increase the likelihood of a full recovery.



WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Preoccupation with weight, food, calories, body image, and/or dieting.
- Fluctuations in weight (both up and down).
- Refusing to eat certain foods or whole food categories (e.g., no carbohydrates, no dairy).
- Development of abnormal, secretive, extreme, or ritualized food or eating habits.
- Eating beyond point of comfortable fullness.
- Disappearance of large amount of food.
- Intense fear of weight gain.
- Loss of menstrual period in women.
- Extreme mood swings.
- Skipping meals or eating small portions.
- Frequent trips to the bathroom after meals.
- Abuse of laxatives, diet pills, or diuretics.
- Dizziness, fainting.
- Fear of eating after a scary experience with food (e.g., choking, vomiting, stomach pain).
- Excessive exercise.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

- Eating disorders affect more than 30 million Americans and many more youth worldwide.
- Among U.S. females in their teens and 20's, the prevalence of clinical and sub-clinical Anorexia Nervosa may be as high as 15%
- In a large study of 14- and 15-year-olds, dieting was the most important predictor of a developing eating disorder.
- From 1999 to 2009, the number of men hospitalized for an eating disorder-related cause increased by 53%.
- 48-51% of people with anorexia nervosa, 54-81% of people with bulimia nervosa, and 55-65% of people with binge eating disorder are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

RESOURCES

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/what-are-eating-disorders>

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>

<https://anad.org/education-and-awareness/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>

The Science Behind the Academy for Eating Disorders' Nine Truths About Eating Disorders.

Le Grange et al., (2012). Eating disorder not otherwise specified presentation in the US population.

Zhao, Y., Encinosa, W. Update on Hospitalizations for Eating Disorders, 1999 to 2009.

Hudson JI et al., (2007). The prevalence and correlates of eating disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication.

Ulfvebrand, et al., (2015). Psychiatric comorbidity in women and men with eating disorders results from a large clinical database.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

SEEK MEDICAL EVALUATION

Eating disorders can cause a wide range of medical challenges. Schedule a visit with your doctor to ensure your child's health is not at immediate risk.

BE HONEST AND USE "I" STATEMENTS.

Be open and honest about your concerns and stick to the facts. Point out what you have observed. For example, "I have noticed you stopped eating dinner with us."

BE CARING, BUT FIRM.

Show compassion and understanding by listening to your child. Ask your child if he or she has his or her own reasons for wanting to change. If any of the above symptoms are present, remain firm in tackling problematic eating behaviors and the need for your child to seek professional support.

FOSTER SELF-ESTEEM.

Avoid commenting on your teen's weight or size or that of others. Focusing on shape and weight may send the message that the way someone looks is most important. Instead, practice body positivity and appreciation of qualities outside of appearance, such as curiosity and a sense of humor.

MODEL HEALTHY ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS.

Stay away from labeling foods as "good" or "bad". Allow all foods in your home. Encourage balanced eating of a variety of foods.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.

Most people with eating disorders require professional help to get better. Seek treatment from a team of providers including a medical doctor, dietician, and psychologist. Getting timely treatment increases a person's chances for recovery. See resources below.

Note: If your child expresses thoughts about wanting to kill themselves or is saying unsafe things, or if you suspect medical complications from eating disorder behaviors (such as fainting) call 911 or bring your child to the nearest Emergency Department.

Additional Recommended Resources

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

<http://maudsleyparents.org/welcome.html>

Books for Teens and Families:

Help Your Teenager Beat an Eating Disorder. James Lock, MD, PhD, Daniel Le Grange, PhD (2015).

When Your Teen Has an Eating Disorder. Lauren Muhlheim, PsyD (2018).

Anorexia and Other Eating Disorders: How to Help Your Child Eat Well and Be Well (2014).

Life Without Ed. Jenni Schaefer (2014)

Brave Girl Eating, Harriet Brown (2010).

The Body Image Workbook for Teens. Julia Taylor and Melissa Atkins Wardy (2014)

What's Eating You? Tammy Nelson, MS (2008).