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Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are characterized by behavioral problems, mental or physical, brought on by interactions of several factors, including emotional and personality disorders, family pressures, a possible genetic or biologic susceptibility, and a culture in which there is an overabundance of food and an obsession with thinness. There are four general types of eating disorders: [Anorexia nervosa](#), [Bulimia nervosa](#), [Binge eating](#) and [Eating disorders not otherwise specified](#).¹

Anorexia Nervosa^{1,2}

People who intentionally starve themselves suffer from an eating disorder called, Anorexia Nervosa. This disorder usually starts around puberty and results in extreme weight loss. Many people with the disorder look emaciated but are convinced they are overweight. Sometimes they must be hospitalized to prevent starvation.



Facts associated with anorexia nervosa:



- At least 15% to as much as 60% of normal body weight is lost.
- The patient with anorexia nervosa has an intense fear of gaining weight, even when he or she is severely underweight.
- Individuals with anorexia nervosa have a distorted image of their own weight or shape and deny the serious health consequences of their low weight.
- Women with anorexia nervosa miss at least three consecutive menstrual periods. (Some experts believe women can be anorexic without this occurrence.)

Eating Disorder Screening Quiz:

<http://psychcentral.com/eatingquiz.htm>

There are two types of anorexia nervosa:

- **Restricting type** -- The person restricts their food intake on their own and does not engage in binge-eating or purging behavior.
- **Binge eating/purging type** -- The person self-induces vomiting or misuses laxatives, diuretics, or enemas.

Bulimia Nervosa₂

Bulimia Nervosa is more common than Anorexia and it usually begins during adolescence. It is a disorder usually characterized by cycles of bingeing and purging.



- Bulimia is often triggered when young women attempt restrictive diets, fail, and react by binge eating. (Binge eating involves consuming amounts of food within a 2-hour period that are larger than average portions.)
- In response to the binges, patients compensate, usually by purging, vomiting, using enemas, or taking laxatives, diet pills, or drugs to reduce fluids.
- Patients then revert to severe dieting, excessive exercise, or both. (Some patients with bulimia follow bingeing only with fasting and exercise. They are then considered to have non-purging bulimia.)
- The cycle then swings back to bingeing and then to purging again.
- Some studies have reported that patients with bulimia average about 14 episodes of binge-purging per week. To be diagnosed with bulimia, however, a patient must binge and purge at least twice a week for 3 months. (Some experts believe that going through the cycle only once a week is sufficient for a diagnosis.)
- In some cases, the condition progresses to anorexia. Most people with bulimia, however, have a normal to high-normal body weight, although it may fluctuate by more than 10 pounds because of the binge-purge cycle.

Binge Eating Disorder₂

Binge eating disorder is similar to Bulimia; however, there is no purging. Binge Eating Disorder usually leads to a person becoming overweight.

To be diagnosed as a binge eater, a person typically has the following characteristics:

- Bingeing at least twice a week for 6 months
- Consuming 5,000 - 15,000 calories in one sitting
- Eating three meals a day plus frequent snacks
- Overeating continually throughout the day, rather than consuming large amounts of food during binges

Eating Attitudes Test

<http://psychcentral.com/quizzes/eat.htm>

Contact Us

Hours: Monday-Friday,
8:30am- 5:00pm.
Evening hours are
available on a limited
basis.

(540) 989-6605 or 800-
699-9396

Nights and Weekends call
RESPOND:

(540) 776-1100 or 800-
541-9992

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Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (NOS)₂

This last category was established to define eating disorders that are not specifically categorized as Anorexia or Bulimia. Some characteristics might include:

- Infrequent binge-purge episodes, which occur less than two times a week
- Repeated chewing and spitting without swallowing large amounts of food
- Normal weight and anorexic behavior

Typical patients with the diagnosis do tend to be older, but have similar risks and health problems.

Warning Signs of Eating Disorders₃

Eating Disorders do have warning signs. You should be aware of the following signs:

- Fear of being unable to stop eating once you start
- Abusing drugs or alcohol before "binge eating"
- Intentional vomiting after meals
- Constant low-calorie or crash dieting
- Compulsive exercises with strict "exercise rules"
- Using body weight and being thin to measure self-worth
- Thinking or talking constantly about food
- Refusing to discuss food at all
- Using food to hide anger, loneliness, or feelings of rejection

If you are concerned about any of the above behaviors or attitudes, whether your own or a friend's or family member's, consider professional help.

What should you say to a friend you are concerned about?₄

- [Set a time to talk.](#)
- [Communicate your concerns.](#)
- [Ask your friend to explore these concerns with a counselor, doctor, nutritionist, or other health professional who is knowledgeable about eating issues.](#)
- [Avoid conflicts or a battle of the wills with your friend.](#)
- [Avoid placing shame, blame, or guilt on your friend regarding their actions or attitudes.](#) Do not use accusatory "you" statements like, "You just need to eat." Or, "You are acting irresponsibly." Instead, use "I" statements. For example: "I'm concerned about you because you refuse to eat breakfast or lunch." Or, "It makes me afraid to hear you vomiting."
- [Avoid giving simple solutions.](#) For example, "If you'd just stop, then everything would be fine!"
- [Express your continued support.](#) Remind your friend that you care and want your friend to be healthy and happy.



References

1. **Source:** Anorexia Nervosa. Psych Central.
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3. **Source:** Warning Signs of Eating Disorders. Courtesy of Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
4. **Source:** What Should I say? National Eating Disorder Association
http://www.edap.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=286&Profile_ID=41174