

# EATING DISORDER

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## **Eating Disorder**

Approximately 500,000 American women suffer from some kind of eating disorder, most between the ages of 10-34. On college campuses alone, up to 20% of female students have bulimia or will in the future. Eating disorders are serious and complex diseases that affect both the physical and psychological safety of the individual.

### **Anorexia Nervosa**

Anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) is triggered by emotional distress, problems in relationships, and/or dieting. It typically strikes those described as perfectionists and high achievers. Those with anorexia nervosa experience a sense of control only when they say "no" to the normal food demands of their bodies. Anorexics starve themselves even though they are weak, hungry and dangerously thin.

Anorexics lose weight by drastic dieting. Some abuse laxatives or vomit after they eat. Many exercise compulsively to burn off unwanted calories. Terrified of gaining weight, anorexics starve themselves in spite of constant hunger and obsessive thoughts about food.

Researchers find self-starvation in men and women of all ages, all ethnic backgrounds, and all socio-economic groups.

### **Bulimia Nervosa**

Bulimia nervosa (the binge-purge syndrome) is also triggered by emotional distress, problems in relationships, and/or dieting. Most bulimics binge (a binge may be six cookies after a diet meal or 50,000 calories gobbled down in one to two hours) and then purge by making themselves vomit as soon as they have eaten. Some abuse laxatives, diuretics (water pills), and diet pills. Many exercise excessively to burn calories.

About 50% of all anorexics become binge/purgers. Many binges are triggered by hunger plus anxiety, emotional distress, and problems in relationships.

Both anorexia and bulimia are serious disorders that can lead to medical problems or death.

## Signs and Symptoms of Eating Disorders

Signs and Symptoms of an eating disorder may be any of the following:

- Anorexia Nervosa
  - Excessive weight loss
  - Loss of menstrual period
  - Infertility
  - Dry, thin hair
  - Dry skin covered with downy fuzz
  - Brittle splitting nails
  - Cold hands and feet
  - Wasted muscles
  - Constipation, and digestive difficulties
  - Abdominal discomfort, bloating
  - Kidney and bladder infections, urinary tract stones
  - Dehydration
  - Muscle cramps
  - Tremors
  - Cavities and gum disease
  - Depression and social isolation
  - Periods of frantic activity alternating with lethargy and depression
  - Denial that anything is wrong

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- Bulimia Nervosa
  - Weight changes because of alternating diets and binges
  - Menstrual irregularities
  - Swollen glands in neck beneath jaw
  - Sore throat and sinus infections
  - Cavities and loss of tooth enamel
  - Puffy, splotched face; bags under eyes
  - Broken blood vessels in eyes or face
  - Fainting spells
  - Blurred vision
  - Tremors
  - Rapid or irregular heart beat
  - Stomach and abdominal discomfort
  - Nausea, stomach cramps, ulcers, colitis
  - Muscle cramps and weakness
  - Stiffness or numbness in arms and legs
  - Problems with alcohol and other drugs in an attempt to numb feelings
  - Shoplifting
  - Sexual promiscuity in an attempt to be accepted
  - Dehydration
  - Blood sugar irregularities

- Kidney and bladder infections; urinary tract stones
- Depression

### **How do I help someone with an eating disorder?**

To help someone with an eating disorder you may want to try some of these steps:

- Listen to the person's concerns.
- Let them know that you are aware that an eating disorder is a serious problem.
- Focus on their concerns about health, not weight or appearance. Mention that eating disorders can be treated successfully.
- Don't be judgmental. Don't criticize their behavior.
- Refer them to SLCC Health and Wellness Services (957-4268).
- Encourage them to seek professional help.

### **Great Links**

For more information on eating disorders, link up with these other great sites. Or come by the Health and Wellness Office for information and brochures!

For more information on eating disorders go to any of these great sites:

- [www.edreferral.com](http://www.edreferral.com)
- [www.mirror-mirror.org](http://www.mirror-mirror.org)
- [www.something-fishy.org](http://www.something-fishy.org)