

## Eating Disorders

- ⇒ At least 30 million people of all ages and genders suffer from an eating disorder in the U.S.
- ⇒ Every 62 minutes at least one person dies as a direct result from an eating disorder
- ⇒ Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness
- ⇒ Eating disorders affect all races and ethnic groups

### Overview

Eating disorders are actually serious and often fatal illnesses that are associated with severe disturbances in people's eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

#### Anorexia nervosa

People with anorexia nervosa may see themselves as overweight, even when they are dangerously underweight.

#### Bulimia nervosa

People with bulimia nervosa have recurrent and frequent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food and feeling a lack of control over these episodes. This binge-eating is followed by forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviors. People with bulimia nervosa may be slightly underweight, normal weight, or over overweight.

#### Binge-eating disorder

People with binge-eating disorder lose control over his or her eating. Unlike bulimia nervosa, periods of binge-eating are not followed by purging, excessive exercise, or fasting. As a result, people with binge-eating disorder often are overweight or obese. *Binge-eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the U.S.*

### Signs and Symptoms

- *Skipping meals, making excuses for not eating or eating in secret*
- *Excessive focus on food*
- *Persistent worry or complaining about being fat*
- *Frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws*
- *Misusing laxatives, diuretics or enemas after eating*

- *Excessive exercise*
- *Regularly going to the bathroom right after eating or during meals*
- *Eating much more food in a meal or snack than is considered normal*
- *Expressing depression, disgust, shame or guilt about eating habits*

## Specific to Teens

- **Societal pressure.** Popular culture tends to place a premium on being thin. Even with a normal body weight, teens can easily develop the perception that they're fat. This can trigger an obsession with losing weight and dieting.
- **Favorite activities.** Participation in activities that value leanness — such as modeling and elite athletics — can increase the risk of teen eating disorders.
- **Personal factors.** Genetics or biological factors might make some teens more likely to develop eating disorders. Personality traits such as perfectionism, anxiety or rigidity also might play a role.

## Risk Factors

Eating disorders can affect people of all ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, body weights, and genders. Eating disorders frequently appear during the teen years or young adulthood but may also develop during childhood or later in life. These disorders affect both genders, although rates among women are higher than among men. Like women who have eating disorders, men also have a distorted sense of body image.

## Treatments

Treatment plans are tailored to individual needs and may include one or more of the following:

- *Individual, group, and/or family psychotherapy*
- *Medical care and monitoring*
- *Nutritional counseling*
- *Medications*

## How Do I Get Help?

An eating disorder can be difficult to manage or overcome by yourself. Eating disorders can virtually take over your life. If you're experiencing any of these problems, or if you think you may have an eating disorder, seek a mental health professional. If you're worried about a loved one, urge him or her to talk to a mental health professional.

For parents, here are some strategies to help your teen develop healthy-eating behaviors:

- **Talk to your teen** - It's crucial to correct any misperceptions about food and talk to your teen about the risks of unhealthy eating choices.
- **Cultivate and reinforce a healthy body image** - in your teen, whatever his or her shape or size. Avoid criticizing your own body in front of your child. Messages of acceptance and respect can help build healthy self-esteem and resilience that will carry children through the rocky periods of the teen years.

If you notice a family member or friend who seems to show signs of an eating disorder, consider talking to that person about your concern for his or her well-being. Although you may not be able to prevent an eating disorder from developing, reaching out with compassion may encourage the person to seek treatment.

Need help getting connected to a professional? Email [counseling@breakdownstl.org](mailto:counseling@breakdownstl.org) for assistance.

Sources:

\* National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders - <https://anad.org>

\* National Institute of Mental Health - <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

\* Mayo Clinic - <https://www.mayoclinic.org>