

# Signs of Eating Disorders



Eating disorders are extreme behaviors involving food and can be considered an addiction. Eating disorders are behavior marked by severe under-eating or over-eating, in addition to distress or concern about body weight or shape. These kinds of disorders are complex, and research has not yet pinpointed specific biological and neurological causes. However, sufferers seem to have difficulty expressing feelings of low self worth, loss of control, depression, or identity, and often are unable to communicate with family members. These disorders usually appear first in adolescence but can develop later in life. Women and girls are more likely to have eating disorders, and there are approximately ten million female sufferers in this country alone. Males account for about 5 to 15 percent of patients with anorexia or bulimia but account for 35 percent of those with an "eating disorder not otherwise specified." Males are more likely to exercise excessively, which may be the only symptom of an eating disorder.

The two main types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Other eating disorders are included in a category called "Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified." These disorders are described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV*, published by the American Psychiatric Association.

These disorders are serious and life threatening. The symptoms often mask an underlying mental or physical illness, but the eating disorder behaviors alone can create additional health problems affecting heart, lung, liver, and kidney function as well as causing muscle wastage and bone density loss.

A person does not need to exhibit all the signs to be diagnosed with an eating disorder. If you see more than two of signs of an eating disorder in your child, you need to make appointments for physical and mental health screenings. This will be a time to be firm with your child, but to avoid confrontation by just stating overall concern in your child's health. Most eating disorders are marked by secrecy and shame, so be prepared to hear strong denials.

## Signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- Noticeable thinness and continued weight loss, well below normal body weight.
- Dieting and deliberate restriction of food intake.
- May use the bathroom frequently between meals (may be overusing laxatives or enemas and/or inducing vomiting).
- Preoccupation with food, calories, and cooking but denies being hungry.
- Frequent weigh-ins on scale and examinations of self in mirror.
- Excessive exercise.
- Complaints of feeling bloated or nauseated no matter how much food was eaten.
- Hair loss or thinning hair.
- Feels cold no matter what the surrounding temperature is.
- Little or no menstruation in females.



# Signs of Eating Disorders, cont.



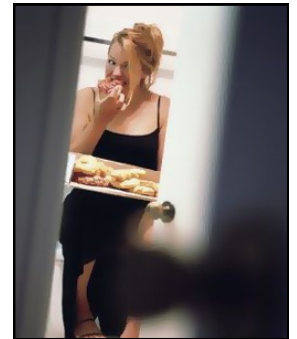
## Signs of Bulimia Nervosa

- Frequent bathroom use between meals (may be overusing laxatives or enemas and/or inducing vomiting).
- Reacts to emotional stress by overeating or binge eating.
- Frequent fluctuations in weight.
- Obsessive concern with being overweight.
- Excessive exercise.
- Possible swollen facial glands due to self-induced vomiting
- Feelings of guilt or shame about eating and an inability to stop any of the bingeing and purging behaviors.
- Depressed moods.
- Menstrual irregularities in females.

## Signs of Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (a category which includes the following:)

### 1. Compulsive Overeating

- Episodes of uncontrolled eating followed by periods of guilt and depression.
- Large amounts of food are consumed, past the point of being "uncomfortably full."
- Feelings of being pressured or frenzied.



### 2. Binge Eating Disorder

- Recurrent episodes of uncontrolled eating even when not hungry.
- Food consumption past the point of being "uncomfortably full."
- Rapid eating and/or secret eating.
- Feelings of disgust and guilt before and during bingeing.
- Binge-eating episodes are accompanied by purging at least two times a week.

### 3. Obesity

- Over 25% above ideal body weight for age and height.
- Daily food intake may be within the normal range but over time is excessive.
- Seldom or never exercises and has no established exercise regimen.

For more information on eating disorders, please visit:  
<http://www.eatingdisorderfoundation.org/EatingDisorders.htm>  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>