

Definitions & Warning Signs of Eating Disorders

What is Anorexia Nervosa?

- Self-imposed starvation due to intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat.
- Person is very underweight (at least 15% below his healthy body weight).
- But she has a very distorted body image and thinks she's fat.
- Amenorrhea in women (loss of > 3 consecutive menstrual periods).

NOTE:

- Age of onset: Usually early or late adolescence (13-18 years of age).
- 90-95% of cases are women, 5-10% are men.
- Prevalence = ~1% of adolescent and young women.

SIGNS:

Physical:

- very thin, often to the point of emaciation
- dry skin and hair
- growth of fine body hair, noticeable on face and arms
- cold hands and feet and extreme sensitivity to cold temperature
- general weakness but seemingly hyperactive
- lightheadedness
- low blood pressure and heart rate
- constipation and digestive problems
- (in women) loss of menstrual periods

Behavioral:

- rigid, restricted eating patterns (i.e. no fat or high calorie foods allowed, strict adherence to certain number of calories per day, often vegetarian)
- food rituals, such as cutting food into small pieces and playing with it
- avoidance of social situations involving food; avoidance of eating in public
- excessive, compulsive exercise
- excessive, compulsive working or studying
- checking weight frequently (often many times a day)
- comments about how fat they are
- wearing sweaters and baggy clothes to hide thinness
- inability to concentrate
- isolation from family and friends
- high emotions: tearful, uptight, overly sensitive

What is Muscle Dysmorphia? (AKA: "Bigorexia")

- Preoccupation with the idea that one's body is not lean and muscular enough.
- Compulsive need to maintain a strict exercise, diet, and/or supplement schedule (often despite knowledge of adverse effects).
- The preoccupation and compulsion cause significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

NOTE:

- Prevalence unknown.
- In one survey of men from gyms in the Boston and Los Angeles area, 10% of men displayed prominent symptoms of "bigorexia."

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS:

- gives up social opportunities, misses school, or takes excessive time off from work due to need to work out
- follows special diets, such as very high protein or very low fat diet
- spends a lot of money on dietary supplements and/or drugs advertised to boost muscularity
- turns down invitations to go to restaurants, parties, or dinners because of special dietary requirements
- avoids situations where people might see their bodies, such as beaches, swimming pools, locker rooms, and public showers
- wears baggy clothes to cover up their bodies and/or deliberately chooses clothes that make them look more muscular
- frequently measures body, such as using a tape measure to check the size of their waists, chests, or biceps
- continues to work out even when they have an injury
- frequently compares their muscularity with others

What is Binge Eating Disorder?

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating (at least 2x per week for 6 mo.); no purging.
- This results in feelings of guilt, disgust, depression, and extreme distress.
- While there is no purging, there may be sporadic fasts or repetitive diets.

NOTE:

- Up to 40% of obese people may suffer from this.
- 65% are women and 35% are men.
- Prevalence = About 3% of men and women.

What is Bulimia Nervosa?

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating and purging (at least 2x per week for 3 mo.).
- During a binge, person uncontrollably consumes a very large number of calories (usually 1500-3,000 calories) in a short period of time (e.g. less than 2 hrs.).
- This results in feelings of guilt, disgust, and fear.
- So person resorts to any number of methods in an effort to get rid of all those calories: vomiting, laxatives, diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise.

NOTE:

- Age of onset: Usually mid adolescence to late 20s.
- About 90% of cases are women, 10% are men.
- Prevalence: 5% of college age women.

SIGNS:

Physical:

- average or above average weight
- weakness, headaches, dizziness
- frequent weight fluctuations due to alternating binges and fasts
- difficulty swallowing, damage to throat
- swollen glands that give chipmunk appearance
- red, puffy, bloodshot eyes (especially after vomiting)
- dental caries and damaged tooth enamel
- scabs on knuckles from self-induced vomiting
- (in women) loss of menstrual periods

Behavioral:

- strange behavior that surrounds secretive eating
- refusal to eat with friends
- disappearance after meals, often to the bathroom, and hear running water
- ability to eat enormous amounts of food without weight gain
- compulsive exercise beyond normal training
- depression