Eating Disorders

Definition - Eating disorders are characterized by severe distortions in an individual's perception of their body shape, preoccupation with their weight and severe disturbances in eating behavior. Generally, these behaviors fall into two categories: anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

- Anorexia Nervosa is characterized by a refusal to maintain a minimally normal body weight.
- Bulimia Nervosa is characterized by repeated episodes of binge eating followed by inappropriate compensatory behaviors (self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives or other medications, fasting, or excessive exercise).

These disorders affect men, women, and children of all races. Eating-disordered individuals have many different body weights. Terms like anorexia”, “bulimia and “compulsive over eating” refer to a behavior, not a body shape or type.

Statistics

- Anorexia and bulimia affect primarily people in their teens and twenties.
- Research suggests that about one percent (1%) of female adolescents have anorexia. That means about 1 out of every 100 young women between 10 and 20 are starving themselves.
- Research also suggests that about four percent (4%) or 4 out of 100 college aged women have bulimia. About 50% of people who have been anorexic develop bulimia or bulimic patterns.
- The mortality (death) rate for eating disorders ranges from 10 - 15%; approximately 1000 women die each year of anorexia or bulimia. One in 10 cases of anorexia result in death from malnutrition, cardiac arrest, or suicide.
- Men are affected also. 10% of the adult eating disordered population and 25% of eating disordered children are male.

Signs & Symptoms

- A preoccupation with food and weight (i.e. counting calories, excessive dieting, weighing oneself several times per day).
- Claims of “feeling fat” when weight is normal or even low; individual experiences "body distortion" (they perceive their shape to be something other than it is).
- Guilt and shame about eating; not wanting to eat in front of other people.
- Evidence of binge-eating, hoarding of food, use of laxatives, diuretics, purgatives, and emetics.
- Excessive exercise; exercising to lose weight not to get fit.
- Emotional changes: moodiness, depression, irritability, social withdrawal.
- Extreme concern about appearance.
- An over sensitivity to criticism of any kind.
- A need for perfection, inflexibility; thinking in extremes (i.e. If I'm not thin, I'll be obese).
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Perfectionism; feelings like "nothing I ever do is enough."
- Fears of being stared at, judged or being thought of as stupid
- A need to control physical and emotional surroundings.
Lying about food intake or lack there-of, to avoid eating or to sneak food about use of laxatives, diuretics and purging.
Medical and/or dental complications

For Further Information:

Something Fishy: Website on Eating Disorders: a comprehensive website dedicated to increasing awareness and providing support for individuals affected by anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive overeating. To connect with the website, click here.


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