

Eating Disorders



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Introduction

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, are psychological disorders that involve extreme disturbances in eating behavior. A person with anorexia refuses to maintain a normal body weight. Someone with bulimia has repeated episodes of binge eating followed by compulsive behaviors such as vomiting or the use of laxatives to remove the food.

Experts believe many persons who have an eating disorder have kept the problem a secret. Eating disorders often start in the late teens and early adulthood.

Overview and facts

Eating disorders were thought to be affecting females only however 10-15% of the persons who have eating disorders are males.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, as many as 1 in every 100 females has anorexia nervosa. Persons with anorexia fear gaining weight and are at least 15% below their ideal body weights. They believe the main measure of self-worth is their body image.

Symptoms

Symptoms of eating disorders may include the following:

- A distorted body image
- Skipping most meals
- Unusual eating habits (such as eating thousands of calories at one meal or skipping meals)
- Frequent weighing
- Extreme weight change
- Insomnia or sleeping problems
- Constipation
- Skin rash or dry skin
- Dental cavities
- Erosion of tooth enamel
- Loss of hair or nail quality
- Hyperactivity and high interest in exercise

Persons with eating disorders are often in denial that anything is wrong. They may be moody, anxious, or depressed. They may withdraw from friends, and become overly sensitive to criticism. The problem arises when relatives are not aware of these symptoms because the person keeps them hidden; just like the trauma, insecurities, depression, or low self-esteem that may help trigger the disorder.

Consult a doctor if:

- You feel like you have symptoms of an eating disorder.
- You suspect a family member or friend has an eating disorder, talk with them about the problem.

The sooner you get medical and psychological treatment, the faster you will be on your way to recovery.

Causes and Risk Factors

There is no one cause of an eating disorder. Experts link eating disorders to a combination of factors, such as family relationships, psychological problems, and genetics. The person may have low self-esteem and be preoccupied with having a thin body.

Sometimes, being part of a sport such as ballet, gymnastics, or running, where being lean is encouraged, is associated with eating disorders in teens. In some studies, researchers linked anorexia with an obsession with perfectionism, concern over mistakes, high personal standards, and parental expectations and criticism.

Test and Diagnosis

To diagnose an eating disorder, a person should consult a mental health professional who will rely on scientific criteria to check whether he/she has an eating disorder.

The doctor will examine you and ask about your symptoms. He or she may ask other questions to see how you are doing emotionally. This is called a mental health assessment. Your doctor may also do blood or urine tests to rule out other conditions.

Treatment

The main treatments for eating disorders are a combination of:

- Psychotherapy/ Cognitive behavioral therapy which helps by identifying and replacing inaccurate thoughts to help change behavior and emotional state.
- Medication such as antidepressants .
- Nutritional feeding and medical monitoring.

If left untreated, eating disorders can lead to serious illness and even death.

Along with the lower body weight, girls with anorexia nervosa can lose their menstrual periods (amenorrhea). The loss of periods is associated with osteopenia, early bone loss that can lead to painful fractures.

Eating disorders are also linked to other serious health problems such as diabetes, sleep apnea, and cardiovascular disease. Each of these health problems requires specific tests and treatment.

Sources and Links

www.idraac.org
www.webmd.com