Recognize & Get Help for Eating Disorders

Many people think about their weight and size throughout the day. Being aware of what to eat is important but there is a point when it can become dangerous. It's always good to want to be fit and keep control of one's diet. But when someone seems fixated on losing weight and will do whatever it takes to do so, an eating disorder may be involved.

Each year, millions of people in the U.S. develop eating disorders. The three most common such conditions are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating. An eating disorder is an illness whereby people try to control their weight. They do this either by starving, overeating, or a combination of binge eating and purging. While young women are most commonly at risk, these disorders can be found among all types of people.

Eating disorders don't happen because of failures of willpower or character. Instead, they are real, treatable medical illnesses in which certain damaging patterns of eating have taken on a life of their own.

In this issue of *Your Source*, we take a close look at:

- Different types of eating disorders. We examine how they can be recognized and successfully treated.
- How a distorted body image can contribute to poor self-esteem and eating disorders.
- How to help teens develop healthier self-images.

Go online today! Log on to access *Eating Disorders* under the Library/In the Spotlight section. There is a wealth of information available on eating disorders and how you can arrange help for someone you know.

Employee Assistance Program
We care, just call.
1-800-222-0364
1-888-262-7848 TTY Users
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Body Image Can Impact Self-Esteem

Our body image is the way we see ourselves when we look in the mirror. It is how we think about our own body—our feelings about our appearance, shape, height and weight. Body image can impact our self-esteem: how we value ourselves, and how we think others value us.

- Having a healthy body image means that you accept your body the way it is, and are comfortable in your body.
- People with a negative body image often suffer with low self-esteem, which can lead to depression and other types of emotional impacts.
- Those not satisfied with their bodies are more likely to develop eating disorders. These involve obsessions with food, weight loss and appearance.
- Images in pop culture media such as ads, movies and fashion magazines are often computer-enhanced. They can cause people to compare themselves unfairly to unrealistic ideals of thinness and beauty.
- Part of developing good self-esteem is to accept and respect ourselves. It helps to replace negative thoughts and feelings about ourselves with positive and accepting ones.
- Our value as complex individuals goes much deeper than the surface aspect of how we look.

Get Help for Eating Disorders

An eating disorder is a serious threat to one's health and well-being. So it's important to recognize dangerous behaviors and arrange help for the individual. Some of the warning signs include:

- An intense fear of becoming heavier, even though underweight.
- An obvious weight decrease in a short period of time.
- Abnormal eating habits, including extreme dieting, refusal to eat in front of others, or secretive bingeing.
- Compulsive exercising.
- Avoidance of typical activities because of weight concerns
- Changes in wardrobe including wearing larger clothes to hide any weight loss.

There are three primary types of eating disorders:

- **Anorexia nervosa**, a type of self-starvation, is probably the best known eating disorder. It involves great anxiety about gaining weight.
- The second major eating disorder is **bulimia nervosa**. Symptoms include "bingeing and purging." A bulimic person typically eats a great deal, then purges through self-caused vomiting or misuse of laxatives or other drugs.
- Patterns of eating in **binge eating disorder** are similar to bulimia, but there is no purging of the excess calories.

Eating disorders often coexist with other behavioral health problems such as depression and anxiety. People with eating disorders may also suffer serious physical health complications. These can include heart conditions and kidney failure, which may even lead to death.

Often people with eating disorders do not admit their illness. This can cause them to avoid getting treatment. But treatment is crucial! The sooner these disorders are diagnosed and treated, the better the outcomes.

Treatment for eating disorders typically includes medical monitoring (including feeding plans) and counseling. It also includes nutritional education and, when appropriate, medication management.

Trusted family members and friends can help make sure people with eating disorders get the care they need. Advice and counsel is available through your program.

Now That's An Idea!

Help Teens Have a Healthy Body Image

Only make positive comments about a teen's appearance. Don't be critical about your teen's weight or shape. Instead, offer compliments about all of his or her positive qualities.

Teach them about how the media misleads. Explain how most media images of celebrated people are airbrushed or photo-edited. Stylists and cosmetic surgeries further fuel misleading body images. Teach teens to have healthy skepticism, and to not compare themselves to unreal images.

Focus on qualities other than appearance. Encourage your teen in his or her efforts to develop talents and skills that are not tied to how they look.

Set a good example. Don't openly criticize your own appearance. Shape your family dialogue in positive directions. Emphasize accomplishments, not flaws.

Consult your program if needed. You can get help for your teen from a counselor—easily accessible 24/7 through your program. This can help your teen learn to appreciate their strengths and develop healthier thinking.

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