

Warning Signs of Eating Disorders

Eating disorders—like anorexia nervosa, bulimia and compulsive overeating—threaten the health and happiness of millions of young people. Watch for these warning signs. If you fear a friend (or you yourself) might have an eating disorder, ask that person to get professional help. Encouragement, caring, and persistence, as well as information about eating disorders and their dangers, may be needed to convince the ill person to get help, stick with treatment, or try again.

Warning Signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- Deliberate self-starvation with weight loss
- Intense, persistent fear of gaining weight
- Refusal to eat, except tiny portions
- Continuous dieting
- Denial of hunger
- Compulsive exercise
- Excessive facial/body hair because of inadequate protein in the diet
- Abnormal weight loss
- Sensitivity to cold
- Absent or irregular menstruation
- Hair loss

Warning Signs of Binge Eating Disorder

People with binge eating disorder often—

- feel their eating is out of control;
- eat what most people would think is an unusually large amount of food;
- eat much more quickly than usual during binge episodes;
- eat until so full they are uncomfortable;
- eat large amounts of food, even when they are not really hungry;
- eat alone because they are embarrassed about the amount of food they eat;
- feel disgusted, depressed, or guilty after over-eating.

Warning Signs of Bulimia Nervosa

- Preoccupation with food
- Binge eating, usually in secret
- Vomiting after bingeing
- Abuse of laxatives, diuretics, diet pills, or drugs to induce vomiting
- Compulsive exercising
- Swollen salivary glands
- Broken blood vessels in the eyes

Physical Problems from Eating Disorders

Malnutrition
Serious heart, kidney, and liver damage
Intestinal ulcers
Ruptured stomach
Tears of the esophagus
Dehydration
Tooth/gum corrosion

Psychological Problems from Eating Disorders

Depression
Shame and guilt
Mood swings
Low self-esteem
Withdrawal
Perfectionism
Impaired family and social relationships
“All or nothing” thinking

Source: Warning Signs For Eating Disorders Fact Sheet, National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (www.anad.org).