

Module 5: Eating disorders



What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders affect several million people at any given time, most often women between the ages of 12 and 35. There are three main types of eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder.

Without treatment of both the emotional and physical symptoms of these disorders, malnutrition, heart problems and other potentially fatal conditions can result. However, with proper medical care, those with eating disorders can resume suitable eating habits, and return to better emotional and psychological health.



What are eating disorders? (continuation)

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is diagnosed when patients weigh at least 15 percent less than the normal healthy weight expected for their height. Hallmarks of anorexia include:

- Limited food intake
- Fear of being “fat”
- Problems with body image or denial of low body weight

People with anorexia nervosa don't maintain a normal weight because they refuse to eat enough, often exercise obsessively, and sometimes force themselves to vomit or use laxatives to lose weight.

What are eating disorders? (continuation)

Bulimia Nervosa

Individuals with bulimia nervosa can be slightly underweight, normal weight, overweight or even obese. But they are not as underweight as people with anorexia nervosa. Patients with bulimia nervosa binge eat frequently, and during these times sufferers may eat an astounding amount of food in a short time, often consuming thousands of calories that are high in sugars, carbohydrates and fat. They can eat very rapidly, sometimes gulping down food without even tasting it.

Their binges often end only when they are interrupted by another person, or they fall asleep or their stomach hurts from being stretched beyond normal capacity. During an eating binge sufferers feel out of control. After a binge, stomach pains and the fear of weight gain are common reasons that those with bulimia nervosa purge by throwing up or using a laxative.

What are eating disorders? (continuation)

Binge Eating Disorder

People with binge eating disorder have episodes of binge eating in which they consume very large quantities of food in a brief period and feel out of control during the binge. Unlike people with bulimia nervosa, they do not try to get rid of the food by inducing vomiting or by using other unsafe practices such as fasting or laxative abuse. The binge eating is chronic and can lead to serious health complications, particularly severe obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

Symptoms and behaviour

Those struggling with an eating disorder may have some, but not all, of the following emotional and behavioural signs. Presence of any of the signs that your family member may be struggling is cause for serious concern and you should encourage them to seek professional help.

The following two pages will give you an overview of the most common symptoms!



Symptoms and behaviour (continuation)

- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Negative or distorted self-image
- Frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws
- Self-worth and self-esteem dependent on body shape and weight
- Fear of eating in public or with others
- Preoccupation with food
- Eating tiny portions or refusing to eat
- Avoiding eating with others
- Hoarding and hiding food
- Eating in secret
- Disappearing after eating—often to the bathroom
- Unusual food rituals (cutting food into small pieces, chewing each bite an unusually large number of times, eating very slowly)

Unit 2: Symptoms and behaviour (continuation)

- Any new practice with food or fad diets, including cutting out entire food groups (no sugar, no carbs, no dairy, vegetarianism/veganism)
- Little concern over extreme weight loss
- Obsessive interest in cooking shows on television and collecting recipes
- Consumption of only “safe” or “healthy” foods
- Social withdrawal
- Making excuses for not eating
- Cooking elaborate meals for others, but refusing to eat them themselves
- Eating strange combinations of foods
- Elaborate food rituals
- Withdrawing from normal social activities

Symptoms and behaviour (continuation)

- Hiding weight loss by wearing bulky clothes
- Flat mood or lack of emotion
- Irritability
- Mood swings
- Hyperactivity and restlessness (unable to sit down, etc.)
- Rigidity in behaviours and routines, and experience of extreme anxiety if these are interrupted
- Excessive exercising
- Exercising even when ill or injured, or for the sole purpose of burning calories

Do you want to learn more?

Our interactive Resource Pack will give you information about

- concerns that you as caregiver might have
- what can be done
- useful tips how to handle the burden of care
- how to avoid stress and burnout
- how to deal with your emotions
- acceptance of the disorder
- and more!

You will also find exercises and activities for YOU and for the care receiver!



The Resource Pack will be available in May 2020!