

Eating Disorders

About eating disorders

There are many influences on an individual's self image. Genetics, personality, cultures and family impact our perception of ourselves and our bodies. We are living, however, in a society that places a value on body weight. As a result, millions of Americans, both women and men, are taking drastic measures to be thin. In doing so, they often sacrifice their health, and in some cases, their lives.

Anorexia nervosa is a disorder that affects 1% of young women. It is characterized by an intense fear of fat, a disturbed sense of body image, and an obsessive desire to be thin. The result is a life-threatening loss of body weight, usually from dietary restriction or self-starvation.

Bulimia nervosa is a disorder that affects 2-4% of young women. It is associated with recurrent episodes of binge eating followed by purging (vomiting, use of laxatives, fasting or vigorous exercise). It is accompanied by feeling of being out of control, guilt and shame. Bulimia also involves being overly concerned with body weight and shape.

Binge eating disorder (BED) is a condition that resembles bulimia nervosa in that individuals binge eat and experience feelings of being out of control. Unlike bulimia, however, BED individuals do not purge after binge eating. Individuals with BED may be of average weight, overweight or obese. Many individuals present with a combination of symptoms. In all cases, however, disordered eating behaviors place individuals at risk both medically and psychologically.

A serious problem

An eating disorder can begin as a simple diet, or as changes in behaviors that often go unnoticed by others. Unfortunately, individuals with eating disorders often deny their problem and find shame in seeking help.

Eating disorders can lead to harmful medical, psychological, and nutritional consequences. It is currently reported that the long-term mortality rate of eating disorders is as high as 20%. In fact, eating disorders can affect every organ system in the body.

Some of the major health risks resulting from eating disorders include:

- heart failure
- osteoporosis
- infertility
- kidney failure
- depressed immune system
- pneumonia
- liver disease
- exercise-related injuries such as stress fractures
- death

We need to be aware of the seriousness of eating disorders, and recognize the signs and symptoms involved. Eating disorders can be treated, but individuals need appropriate help from qualified health care professionals. Treatment usually involves a team approach including care from physicians, psychologists, nurses and nutritionists. Support from family and friends is also needed to help those suffering from an eating disorder.

Site: <http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu/home/healthtopics/eatingdisorders.shtml>

Online resources

- Summit Eating Disorders
www.sedop.org ~ (916) 920-5276
- National Eating Disorders Association
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org ~ (800) 931-2237

ASAP offers confidential, cost-free assessment, counseling, consultation and referral services to all UCDHS faculty, staff, and their family members. Whether the problem is work-related, personal, career or relationship focused, ASAP can assist you in evaluating and resolving the problem.

You can call ASAP at 916-734-2727 for an appointment.