

Eating Disorders

Almost everyone struggles with weight gain at some point in their lives. And, we often hear that the solution is diet and exercise. However, many people have an even greater issue with food called an eating disorder.

Main Types of Eating Disorders

1. **Anorexia nervosa:** People with this eating disorder never feel thin enough. They excessively diet, often to the point of starvation, and see themselves as “fat,” even when underweight.

Symptoms:

- Intense fear of gaining weight.
 - Low self-esteem.
 - Fear of eating in public and preoccupation with food
 - Physical problems: Menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation abdominal pain, irregular heart rhythms, low blood pressure and dehydration.
2. **Bulimia nervosa:** In this case, people endure cycles of extreme overeating, called bingeing, and purging (often through vomiting). As with anorexia, people with this disorder see themselves as “fat.” However, unlike with anorexia, they typically have a normal weight.

Symptoms:

- Self-induced vomiting and/or excessive laxative use; excessive exercise.
 - Feeling a loss of control and low self-esteem.
 - Going to the bathroom after eating or during meals.
 - Physical problems: Abnormal bowel function, sores in the throat and mouth, dehydration, irregular heartbeat, sores on the knuckles or hands due to vomiting, menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation, and substance abuse.
3. **Binge-eating disorder:** People with this disorder experience regular episodes of extreme overeating. However, they do not follow them with purging (as with bulimia) so they often become excessively overweight or obese. Unlike with anorexia and bulimia, binge-eating disorder is almost as common in men as women and it affects older people more than teens.

Symptoms:

- Overeating to the point of pain or discomfort
- Feeling out of control, depressed, or disgusted regarding eating habits
- Frequently eating alone

Risk Factors For Eating Disorders

- **Female:** Teenage girls and young women have a greater risk of having an eating disorder
- **Age:** While eating disorders can affect anyone, they are more common in teens & early 20's
- **Family History:** People with parents/siblings who had an eating disorder are at increased risk
- **Mental Health Linkage:** Depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder are highly linked to eating disorders
- **Complications:** Eating disorders can lead to other complications, including heart problems and digestive problems, and can, in some cases, be life-threatening

Solutions

- **Consult a physician:** Because eating disorders are often associated with physical complications, it is important to schedule an appointment with a medical doctor as soon as possible.
- **Nutrition education:** Meeting with a nutritionist can help you develop healthy eating patterns.
- **Get Connected:** People with eating disorders tend to isolate themselves, feeling shame and guilt. So, it's important to connect with a group to find support and encouragement.
- **Identity in Christ:** The best way to overcome low self-esteem, which often leads to eating disorders, is to discover your identity in Christ. You are a valuable creation of Almighty God (Psalm 8:5-6, 139:14) and He loves you as you are, right now.
- **Don't Give Up:** Overcoming an eating disorder takes time. Set small goals you can reach in a short time to keep yourself encouraged, and keep setting goals you can attain.



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