

# Eating Disorders: What You Should Know

## What is an eating disorder?

You may have an eating disorder if you think about your weight very often and try to lose weight in unhealthy ways. Unhealthy ways to lose weight include:

- Eating very little food
- Making yourself vomit after eating
- Using medicines to make you go to the bathroom
- Taking diet pills
- Exercising too much

If you have an eating disorder, you may use food to control your feelings. You may feel that you need to be perfect and feel bad about yourself when things are out of your control.

## Are there different kinds of eating disorders?

The main types of eating disorders include anorexia (an-uh-REK-see-uh) nervosa, bulimia (bu-LEEM-ee-uh) nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

If you have anorexia nervosa, you are very thin but think you still need to lose weight. You eat very little food. You may be afraid to gain weight. You might feel guilty when you eat.

If you have bulimia nervosa, you worry about your weight. You may overeat and then make yourself vomit, exercise a lot, or take laxatives.

If you have binge-eating disorder, you may be overweight and overeat, then feel embarrassed and guilty.

## Who usually gets eating disorders?

Anyone can get an eating disorder, but they are more common in females and younger people. You may be more likely to get an eating disorder if:

- You have depression (feel sad) or anxiety (feel nervous)
- Someone in your family has had an eating disorder
- You do sports that require a certain body weight or shape, like gymnastics, ballet, wrestling, figure skating, or running

## Can eating disorders cause other health problems?

If you have an eating disorder, you may not be eating enough to keep your body working well. If you are a female, you can stop getting your period. Eating disorders can cause problems with your heart, bones, teeth, skin, and digestive system. You might feel tired or dizzy, your heart might not beat the way it should, and you might have muscle cramps. An eating disorder can make you very sick, and you can die because you aren't getting enough nutrition.

## What should I do if I think I have an eating disorder?

You should talk to your doctor. Your doctor will ask you about what you eat, your weight, and how much you exercise. He or she may also ask about your feelings and relationships. Your doctor will examine you and may do some blood tests. You may also need to see a specialist.



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## How are eating disorders treated?

You may need to take vitamins or medicine for depression or anxiety. A dietitian and counselor can help you change the way you think about food and your weight. It is also helpful for your family to be involved in your treatment. If you are very sick you might need to spend time in a hospital to get better.

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

Academy for Eating Disorders  
<http://www.aedweb.org>

American Academy of Family Physicians  
<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/eating-disorders.html>

Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders  
<http://feast-ed.site-ym.com/>

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders  
<http://www.anad.org>

National Eating Disorders Association  
<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/eating-disorders)

Overeaters Anonymous  
<http://www.oa.org>

### Notes:

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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