WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

Eating Disorders can be defined as eating habits that are hurtful to an individual. They revolve around issues with food and weight and are experienced by men as well as women. About five million women and about one million men struggle with these disorders. They do not discriminate between gender, class, race or age: eating disorders can happen to anyone.

Despite common belief, an eating disorder is not solely based on food, or on the desire to be thinner. There are many contributing factors that lead to the beginnings of an eating disorder, including feeling “out of control” in one’s life, feeling anxious or depressed, sexual abuse, genetic predisposition, family emotional problems, a high need for perfectionism, media and peer pressure. No single cause has been established.

The three most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder.

ANOREXIA NERVOSA is characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss. People with anorexia starve themselves to dangerously thin levels, at least 15% below their appropriate weight. There is an intense fear of gaining weight coupled with a refusal to eat.

Criteria:

• Low Weight
• Weight Phobia: Intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even though underweight.
• Body Image Issues: Believing you are fat when you are not, making your weight the only thing you judge yourself on, denying the medical seriousness of your low weight.
• Loss of menstrual period (women) or low testosterone levels (men).

Warning Signs:

• Loss of menstrual period
• Dieting obsessively when not overweight
• Claiming to feel "fat" when overweight is not a reality
• Preoccupation with food, calories, nutrition, and/or cooking
• Denial of hunger
• Excessive exercising, being overly active
• Frequent weighing
• Strange food-related behaviors
• 15% or more below normal body weight/ rapid weight loss
• Depression
• Slowness of thought/ Memory difficulties
• Hair loss

BULIMIA NERVOSA is characterized by a secretive cycle of binge eating followed by purging. Bulimia includes eating large amounts of food--more than most people would eat in one meal--in short periods of time, then getting rid of the food and calories through vomiting, laxative abuse, or over-exercising.

Criteria:

• Repeated episodes of bingeing and purging
• Binge-Eating on a regular basis.
• Purging: Regular efforts to avoid weight gain, including: self-induced vomiting, laxatives, diuretics, enemas, other medications, fasting, or excessive exercise.
• Feeling out of control during a binge and eating beyond the point of fullness
• Frequency: The binge eating and purging both occur, on average, at least twice a week for three months.
• Extreme concern with body weight and shape

Warning Signs:

• Excessive concern about weight
• Strict dieting followed by eating binges
• Frequent overeating, especially when distressed
• Bingeing on high calorie, sweet foods
• Use of laxatives, diuretics, strict dieting, vigorous exercise, and/or vomiting to control weight
• Leaving for the bathroom after meals
• Being secretive about binges or vomiting
• Planning binges or opportunities to binge
• Feeling out of control

BINGE EATING DISORDER (also known as COMPULSIVE OVEREATING) is characterized primarily by periods of uncontrolled, impulsive, or continuous eating beyond the point of feeling comfortably full. While there is no purging, there may be sporadic fasts or repetitive diets and often feelings of shame or self-hatred after a binge. People who overeat compulsively may struggle with anxiety, depression, and loneliness, which can contribute to their unhealthy episodes of binge eating. Body weight may vary from normal to mild, moderate, or severe obesity.
Criteria:

- Binge-Eating: on a regular basis
- Strange Eating Patterns: eating rapidly, when not hungry, when alone, and/or till uncomfortably full
- Feelings of self-hatred, distress, disgust, guilt and/or depression about the binges

Warning Signs:

- Frequent overeating, especially when distressed
- Bingeing on high calorie, sweet foods
- Being secretive about binges, eating alone
- Feeling out of control when eating
- Depression and guilt

OTHER EATING DISORDERS can include some combination of the signs and symptoms of anorexia, bulimia, and/or binge eating disorder. While these behaviors may not be clinically considered a full syndrome eating disorder, they can still be physically dangerous and emotionally draining. All eating disorders require professional help.

MEDICAL COMPLICATIONS OF EATING DISORDERS

- Acid Reflux
- Constipation
- Loss of Menstrual Cycle
- Dry Skin
- Feeling Cold
- Slowness of Thought
- Erosion of the Teeth and Gums
- Hemorrhoids
- Osteopenia/Osteoporosis
- Stunted Growth in Adolescents
- Heart Rhythm Abnormalities
- Electrolyte Abnormalities
- Abnormal Liver Functioning
- Elevated Cholesterol
- Abnormal Blood Pressure

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WITH AN EATING DISORDER:
You cannot force someone to seek help, change their habits, or adjust their attitudes. You can help by sharing your concerns, providing support, and knowing resources to recommend for more information!

Some helpful ideas on what to do to help your friend:
• **Learn** as much as you can about eating disorders. Read books, articles, and brochures.
• **Find** an appropriate time and place to talk to your friend (in private). Tell them the specific behaviors that you have observed and why you are concerned.
• **Be honest.** Talk openly and honestly about your concerns with the person who is struggling with eating or body image problems. Avoiding it or ignoring it won’t help!
• **Be caring, but be firm.** Caring about your friend does not mean being manipulated by them. Your friend must be responsible for their actions and the consequences of those actions. Avoid making rules, promises, or expectations that you cannot or will not uphold. Do not engage in a power struggle with the person.
• **Be** prepared for the person to deny the problem or the seriousness of the problem.
• **Compliment** your friend’s personality, successes, or accomplishments. Remind your friend that “true beauty” is not simply skin deep. **Do not** give advice on calorie, food intake, weight, etc.
• **Know** resources to recommend to your friend. CSUN campus resources are listed below as well as links to eating disorders information sites.
• **Be a good role model** in regard to sensible eating, exercise, and self-acceptance.

WHERE TO GET HELP:

**ON THE CSUN CAMPUS:**

**UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES**

818/677-2366 or TTY 818/677-7834

Offers confidential counseling to help deal with the pressures of university life. Individual and group counseling is available for eating concern/disorders, relationship issues, life planning and personal problems. Call to schedule an appointment.

**JADE: Joint Advocates on Disordered Eating**

818-677-6500

[www.csun.edu/counseling/jade/html](http://www.csun.edu/counseling/jade/html)

email: jade@csun.edu

Trained peer educators provide eating disorders awareness and prevention programs to classes and organizations on the CSUN campus; provides information and referrals to CSUN students. Visit the JADE website for confidential, anonymous on-line screening for eating disorders and links about eating disorders.
Eating disorders that have been left untreated may result in serious physical complications. The SHC provides medical evaluation and treatment.

Students can meet with a peer nutrition counselor as part of an overall treatment plan to establish and monitor a safe diet plan.

Other resources and links:

AED  Academy for Eating Disorders  www.aedweb.org
ANAD  National Assn of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders  www.ANAD.org
Council on size and Weight Discrimination  www.cswd.org
IAEDP  International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals  www.iaedp.com
NEDA  National Eating Disorders Association  www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
OA  Overeaters Anonymous  www.oa.org
GURZE (books on eating disorders)  www.bulimia.com