

Teenagers With Eating Disorders



Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses that can impair a person's health. In severe cases, they can even lead to significant medical complications and become fatal. While anyone, no matter their age, can develop these conditions, they commonly begin in adolescence.

Considering the danger of these disorders, and the fact that it is common for teenagers to hide their condition, it is essential to recognize the signs.

Types of Eating Disorders And Their Effect On Teenagers

Anorexia Nervosa: People with anorexia experience a severe emotional disorder that leads them to dangerously restrict their food intake, often refusing to eat regularly. They are driven by an extreme fear of gaining weight and are constantly monitoring their body's shape and size.

Teenagers, especially girls with the disorder, tend to do extremely well in school, and are often perfectionists. They struggle with self-esteem and often compare their bodies to others. In their persistent endeavor to lose weight, they starve themselves, and engage in dangerous purging behaviors such as vomiting or taking laxatives. These behaviors give the teenager a sense of control. Symptoms can include:

- Feeling weak, tired, and sluggish
- Slowed breathing and pulse
- Low body temperature and blood pressure
- Dry and yellowing skin
- Brittle nails and hair
- Severe constipation
- Tooth erosion
- Low body weight
- Osteoporosis (decrease in bone mass and density)
- Heart and brain damage
- Multi-organ failure

- Eating disorders can have harmful and life-threatening effects on individuals.
- The most commonly diagnosed eating disorders in teenagers are anorexia and bulimia.
- Eating disorders cause people to engage in unsafe eating behaviors.
- With a specialized treatment plan, and family support, complete recovery is possible.

Bulimia Nervosa: A person with this condition will have periods of binge eating, during which they rapidly consume an excessive number of high calorie foods. This results in feeling a lack of control and shame. The individual will subsequently compensate with purging behaviors such as vomiting, fasting, excessive exercise and taking laxatives or diuretics.

Teenagers will also frequently engage in severe dieting that can result in noticeable weight fluctuations, along with their periods of binge eating. Furthermore, since vomiting is a recognizable sign of bulimia, teenagers will often try to hide this behavior by staying in the bathroom for long periods of time, and running water. This disorder can have serious, and lasting effects on health; including dental problems, hormonal imbalances, and gastrointestinal problems.



Wheeler

**CONNECTICUT
Clearinghouse**
a program of the Connecticut Center
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

800.232.4424 (phone)
www.ctclearinghouse.org

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Symptoms Can Include:

- Chronically inflamed and sore throat
- Sensitive and decaying teeth
- Severe dehydration
- Acid reflux disorder
- Electrolyte imbalance that can lead to stroke or heart attack
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Esophageal or gastric rupture
- Kidney failure

Other Common Types Of Eating Disorders

Binge-Eating Disorder: a person with this condition, similarly to bulimia nervosa, will have periods of binge eating where they feel out of control, and will eat a large amount of food in fast succession. However, with this condition there is no following compensating behavior such as excessively exercising or throwing up. Due to the absence of this behavior, people with this condition tend to be overweight or obese. In 2024, this was the most common eating disorder in the United States.

Avoidant-Restrictive Food Intake Disorder: similar to anorexia nervosa disorder, a person with this condition severely limits what and how much they eat. It differs, in that this behavior is not rooted in a fear of weight gain due to negative body image. This disorder tends to develop in early childhood. As adults, people with this condition struggle with eating enough food to maintain basic body functioning.

Treatment

The earlier people seek treatment for an eating disorder, the better. Anorexia and bulimia put people at a higher risk for suicide and serious medical complications. However, with early intervention, a team approach, and a comprehensive treatment plan, it is possible for a complete recovery.

The goals of treatment are to establish improved nutritional health, and reach a healthier weight. Furthermore, treatment aims to stop damaging behaviors such as starving oneself, purging, or engaging in unsafe compensating actions such vomiting, excessive exercising and use of laxatives or diuretics. The goal is to improve overall health and emotional wellbeing of the individual receiving treatment.

Treatment plans for disordered eating problems are specialized to each individual and can include one or more of the following strategies:

- Individual, family, or group psychotherapy
- Counseling about proper nutrition and healthier behaviors
- Medications such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, or mood stabilizers
- Medical care and overall health monitoring by a healthcare provider

Family support is an imperative component of the treatment process for teenagers who have eating disorders. Having family members actively involved with an individual's treatment has been shown to improve their physical and mental health outcomes.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

2-1-1 of Connecticut

www.211ct.org or call 2-1-1

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

NEDA

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

ANAD

www.anad.org



CONNECTICUT
Mental Health & Addiction Services