



MISSOURI WOMEN: What You Should Know About...

Eating *Disorders*

What are Eating Disorders?

Eating disorders are complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors that have numerous physical, psychological and social ramifications, including significant weight preoccupation, inappropriate eating behavior, and body image distortion. The most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss. People with this disorder eat very little though they are already thin. They have an intense and overpowering fear of body fat and weight gain, repeated dieting attempts, and excessive weight loss. People who have anorexia develop unusual eating habits such as avoiding food and meals, picking out a few foods and eating them in small amounts, weighing their food, and counting the calories of everything they eat. They may also exercise excessively.

Symptoms of anorexia nervosa include:

- **Refusal to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for height, body type, age, and activity level**
- **Intense fear of weight gain or being "fat"**
- **Feeling "fat" or overweight despite dramatic weight loss**
- **Loss of menstrual periods**
- **Extreme concern with body weight and shape**

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia nervosa is a disorder in which one has frequent episodes of secretive, uncontrolled or binge eating followed by behaviors to rid the body of food consumed. This includes self-induced vomiting and/or the misuse of laxatives, diet pills, diuretics, excessive exercise or fasting. This cycle is usually repeated at least several times

DID YOU KNOW?

- *As many as 10 million females and 1 million males in the U.S. are battling eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, while another 25 million suffer from binge-eating disorder.*
- *Eating disorders affect people from all walks of life, including young children, middle-aged women and men and individuals of all races and ethnicities.*

a week or, in serious cases, several times a day. Bulimics are not visibly underweight; yet, like anorexics, they use food as a means of coping with psychological problems. Unlike anorexics, bulimics feel out of control and recognize their abnormal behavior.

Symptoms of bulimia nervosa include:

- Repeated episodes of bingeing and purging
- Feeling out of control during a binge and eating beyond the point of comfortable fullness
- Purging after a binge (typically by self-induced vomiting, abuse of laxatives, diet pills, diuretics, excessive exercise, or fasting)
- Frequent dieting
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape

Binge-Eating Disorder

Binge-eating disorder is the newest clinically recognized eating disorder. It is primarily identified by repeated episodes of uncontrolled eating. People with binge-eating disorder are often overweight because they maintain a high-calorie diet without expending a similar amount of energy. The overeating or bingeing does not typically stop until the person is uncomfortably full. Unlike anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder is not associated with inappropriate behaviors such as vomiting or excessive exercise to rid the body of extra food. Binge-eating disorder is often accompanied by feeling out of control and followed by feelings of depression, guilt, or disgust.

Symptoms of binge-eating disorder include:

- Recurrent episodes of binge-eating, characterized by eating an excessive amount of food within a discrete period of time and by a sense of lack of control over eating during the episode
- Binge-eating episodes are associated with at least three of the following: eating much more rapidly than normal; eating until feeling uncomfortably full; eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry; eating alone because of being embarrassed by how much one is eating; feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed or very guilty after overeating
- Marked distress about the binge-eating behavior
- Binge-eating is not associated with the regular use of inappropriate compensatory behaviors (e.g., purging, fasting, excessive exercise)

Treatment for Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are serious health conditions that can be both physically and emotionally destructive. People with eating disorders need to seek professional help. Early diagnosis and intervention significantly enhances recovery. If not identified or treated in their early stages, eating disorders can become chronic, debilitating, and even life-threatening conditions.

Helpful Resources

Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/bodyimage/eatingdisorders>

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

National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/eatingdisorders.cfm>

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

Eating Disorder Referral and Information Center: <http://www.edreferral.com>

For more information:

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Missouri Department
of Health and Senior Services
P.O. Box 570

Jefferson City, MO 65102

Phone: 573.526.0445

Fax: 573.522.3023

www.dhss.mo.gov/WomensHealth

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