

EATING DISORDERS

Young women and teens are the most at risk for eating disorders, although it is showing itself more in men and older women too.

Eating disorders appear in 3 different ways:

Anorexia nervosa:

- Distorted body image: “I am fat” when it is simply not true, in fact they may already be too thin
- Think constantly about losing weight
- Will eat tiny amounts of food then over exercise to burn off the calories; exercise at unusual times
- Parents will start “getting on them” to eat more, to put on weight; parents will start to bribe, threaten, beg them to eat; it becomes a source of much family conflict
- Often they become obsessed with food, doing the grocery shopping, cooking....but not eating the food
- Obsess about weight more than any other issue
- With females, the menstrual cycle stops; sexual development can stop
- Will become malnourished; they will look malnourished, yet complain about weighing too much
- Other side effects that accompany poor nutrition, e.g., osteoporosis

Bulimia nervosa:

- Resemble anorexia except they eat a lot, also referred to as binge eating
- Once they binge then they induce vomiting, use laxatives or diuretics
- They also may exercise or starve themselves after a binge episode
- They may make many trips to the bathroom, especially during or right after eating
- The vomiting leads to dehydration as too much water is lost
- Recurrent vomiting can erode the esophagus, teeth
- Irregular heartbeat and even a heart attack is possible
- Up and down with weight gain and loss
- Other side effects that accompany poor nutrition, e.g., osteoporosis

Binge eating:

- Eating a lot in a short period of time, without vomiting, laxatives,...
- Outcome is obesity

Eating disorders develop in people where self image and self esteem are a problem. Society promotes “thin” as the best body type. Sports are very concerned about weight. There are many articles published weekly on dieting, weight loss. Physical appearance, body image, is confused with self image, that is, “I have to look good to feel good about myself.” The problem here is that they never reach the desired body type; their perception

of how they really look becomes distorted. Even though they fit the “skin and bones” description, they see themselves as too fat.

Parents become desperate and resort to bribing and threatening their child. They may offer outrageous rewards for taking just one bite of food. This promotes more control issues, which are already a significant part of the problem. Teens already rebel against parental control; eating just serves as another way to do this. It is a tremendously powerful way to control parents.

Many of these teens are overachievers, needing to be perfect, the star athlete, the straight “A” student. Perfectionism fosters the disorder.

Generally these teens do not do well at expressing their emotions; feelings of anger, depression, frustration, worry go unexpressed. Stress is experienced, but they do not cope well with it. Naturally, they deny there are problems.

Recommendations if you suspect an eating disorder:

1. Most importantly, seek help. Talk to your MD, pediatrician. These disorders get more out of control the longer they go on. Eating disorders are bigger and more difficult, and dangerous, than a parent can manage on their own. The solution is not simply “eat more...” Waiting is too risky.
2. Do not get involved in a power struggle attempting to control what goes in, or what comes out. This will just intensify the problem, even though it seems like the right thing, the only thing to do at the time.
3. Educate yourself, read as much as you can from reliable, medical/mental health resources.
4. be patient and supportive; avoid arguing, judging; talk about their strengths and successes.....without being obvious!

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Related Disorders
1-847-831-3438

<http://members.aol.com/anad20/index.html>

Center for Study of Anorexia and Bulimia
www.icpny.org/treatment/csab.html

National Eating Disorders Organization
www.laureate.com/nedointro.html