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## EATING DISORDERS

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In a society that's preoccupied with appearance, it can be hard to develop what we call a "positive body image," or satisfaction with how our bodies look. A positive body image includes making positive lifestyle choices—like getting enough nutrition and exercise to look and feel your best. A negative body image can mean problems with depression, shyness and eating disorders.

### WHAT IS AN EATING DISORDER?

Eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and compulsive overeating. They are all serious emotional problems that can make you sick, threaten your life or even kill you.

**ANOREXIA NERVOSA** is characterized primarily by self-starvation and excessive weight loss.

#### Symptoms of Anorexia:

- Loss of at least 15% of body weight
- Intense fear of weight gain
- Distorted body image
- In females, loss of three consecutive menstrual periods
- Insistence of keeping weight below a healthy minimum

**BULIMIA NERVOSA** is characterized primarily by a secretive cycle of binge eating followed by purging or vomiting.

#### Symptoms of Bulimia:

- Repeated episodes of binge eating and purging
- Feeling out of control during a binge
- Purging after a binge (vomiting, use of laxatives, diet pills, diuretics, excessive exercise, or fasting)
- Frequent dieting
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape

**COMPULSIVE OVEREATING** is characterized primarily by periods of impulsive or continuous eating. A person may fast (eat no food at all) or go on diet after diet. Body weight may vary from normal to mild, moderate or severe obesity. A person who displays these symptoms may suffer from compulsive eating and can benefit from professional help.

Trying to handle weight problems with fad diets or miracle cures is not usually successful. Your body needs balanced nutrition in order to function at its best. Talk with a doctor about the best eating and exercise plan for you. (See also NUTRITION AND EXERCISE, page 32.)

### WHAT CAUSES AN EATING DISORDER?

Most often eating disorders happen because of a combination of psychological, interpersonal and social conditions. Our culture, with its obsession with thinness and the "perfect body," is a main factor. People who wish to be "perfect" may fear that any loss of control means failure. Feelings of inadequacy, depression, anxiety and loneliness, as well as troubled family and personal relationships, may contribute to the development of an eating disorder.

Once started, eating disorders may become self-perpetuating. Dieting, binge eating, and purging may help some people cope with painful emotions and feel as if they are in control of their lives. Yet, at the same time, these behaviors undermine physical health, self-esteem, and a sense of competence.

### What You Can Do to Help

- Learn all you can about anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and compulsive overeating. This way you will avoid judgmental, mistaken attitudes about food, body shape and eating disorders.
- Realize that no particular diet, weight or body size automatically leads to happiness and fulfillment.
- Take action if you think someone you know has an eating disorder. If you catch it early, you can prevent unnecessary suffering. Tell them your concerns in an honest, caring manner. Gently but firmly encourage the person to seek professional help.



If you are concerned about your own or a friend's weight or eating behaviors, check with a doctor, or call:

**Family Counseling Services** . . . . . (715) 842-3346  
**Lutheran Social Services** . . . . . (715) 849-3344  
*Long-distance callers may call Lutheran Social Services toll-free (800) 236-0011*

These programs both offer counseling on a sliding-fee scale.

For more information about counseling for eating disorders, call:

**United Way's 2-1-1** . . . . .*dial 2-1-1 or (715) 848-2255 24 hrs./day*  
*Or, search the Keyword EATING DISORDERS at: [www.unitedwaymc.org/211.htm](http://www.unitedwaymc.org/211.htm)*  
Offers information & referral to community services that can help.

For general information about EATING DISORDERS and their treatment, check out the **National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders** website at: [www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org)