

# What is an Eating Disorder?

\*Please note that these indicators may not be present in all cases, but that they are used as guidelines for identifying disordered eating habits.\*

## ANOREXIA NERVOSA

An emotional disorder characterized by an intense fear of fat that results in extreme dieting. This disorder affects mostly women between the ages of 12 and 24, but may be present in older women and males. Low self-esteem, distorted body image, and an obsession with food are other distinguishing features. Anorexia will result in death in as many as 10-15% of individuals suffering with the disorder.

### Physical Signs

- Significant weight loss
- Amenorrhoea in females (loss of menstrual period)
- Lethargy
- Thinning hair, hair loss, appearance of fine downy hair on extremities (lanugo)

### Behavioural Signs

- Unusual eating patterns and denial of hunger
- Frequent weighing
- Excessive exercise

### Emotional Signs

- Extreme concern about appearance and body size
- Guilt and shame about eating
- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionistic tendencies

## BULIMIA NERVOSA

An emotional eating disorder characterized by episodes of binge eating followed by a method of purging at least two days per week for a period of at least three months. The purge may be any of the following methods: self-induced vomiting, laxatives, diet pills, over exercising, diuretics, or fasting. More than one method may be used. Bulimia may start out as a simple diet, escalating into an uncontrollable binge/purge cycle.

### Physical Signs

- Frequent weight fluctuations
- Hair loss
- Lethargy
- Swelling of glands under the jaw (caused by frequent vomiting)

### Behavioural Signs

- Use of laxatives, diuretics, or substances to induce vomiting
- Binge eating
- Social withdrawal
- Frequent weighing

### Emotional Signs

- Feelings of helplessness
- Low self-esteem
- Preoccupation with food
- Extreme concern about appearance and body size

The Ontario Provincial Network of  
Eating Disorder Service Providers

## BINGE EATING DISORDER

An emotional disorder characterized by episodes of consuming large amounts of food within a discrete time period, while experiencing a loss of control. The amount of food consumed is obviously larger than what most people would eat within a similar time period. In order for the episode to be classified as a binge, the individual must feel a loss of control over their eating. Binge Eating Disorder is diagnosed when binge eating occurs at least two days a week for 6 months. It is not associated with purging behaviours and occurs separately from Anorexia or Bulimia Nervosa.

Binge eating may be caused by dietary restraint and suppression of body weight, even in those who are larger than average size.

### Physical Signs

- Constant increases in weight is typical, although not always the case.

### Behavioural Signs

- Eating more rapidly than normal
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts when not feeling physically hungry
- Eating alone because of feelings of embarrassment

### Emotional Signs

- Feeling disgusted with oneself or guilty after eating
- Depression
- Feelings of helplessness



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