

# What You Should Know About Eating Disorders

**P**eople with eating disorders try to be thin by controlling their weight in unhealthy ways. The two main types of eating disorders are **anorexia nervosa** and **bulimia nervosa**. Eating disorders are not diets or fads. They can cause serious health problems, sometimes even death.

## What is anorexia nervosa?

Someone with anorexia nervosa is intensely afraid of being fat, even if they are not overweight. They eat very little or don't eat at all in order to lose weight. They are usually underweight for their height. Anorexia nervosa can lead to serious health disorders, such as:

- irregular heart beat
- weak bones
- low blood pressure
- kidney problems
- loss of menstrual period.

These problems can cause heart failure, bone fracture, a coma, or even death. Many times, people with anorexia nervosa may also have or have had bulimia nervosa.

## What is bulimia nervosa?

This type of eating disorder involves *binging* and *purging*. During binges, a person eats a lot of food in a short time. Afterward, they feel guilty about doing so. To "undo" the binge, they may make themselves vomit or take laxatives (pills that cause bowel movements). This is called purging. People with bulimia nervosa are constantly binging and purging, so their weight can go up or down quickly. Bulimia nervosa can cause serious health problems, such as:

- dehydration (when your body doesn't have enough water)
- kidney, liver, and bowel problems
- throat, esophagus, and stomach problems (because of forced vomiting)
- irregular heart beat
- tooth and gum problems.

Like anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa can lead to severe health conditions and death. Some people with bulimia nervosa may also have or have had anorexia nervosa.

## What causes eating disorders?

Experts are not sure, but most likely it is a combination of genetics and psychological issues. Women may feel bad about their own bodies because they see pictures of thin models and celebrities in magazines, movies, and on TV. People with eating disorders often have low self-esteem. Someone with an eating disorder may try controlling their

body to feel more in control of life. Traumatic or hurtful events can also trigger an eating disorder.

## Can someone with an eating disorder get better?

Yes. First, they need to admit they have a problem. People with eating disorders may not know they have a problem. They may become defensive when someone mentions it. Family and friends can help by listening and being sensitive. They can try to get the person with the eating disorder to see a doctor who can diagnose and treat the condition.

People with eating disorders should also see a therapist to help them learn new ways of dealing with anger, anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem.

Ask for help if you think you or someone you know may have an eating disorder. The best way to survive anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa is by recognizing and treating it early. With counseling and medical care, people with eating disorders can get better, both physically and mentally.



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## Symptoms of Eating Disorders

### Someone with anorexia nervosa may:

- not eat at all or eat very little
- take diet pills
- over-exercise (even in bad weather, or when hurt/tired)
- prefer not to eat around other people
- stop having her menstrual period
- lose hair, more than normal
- be depressed, angry, or withdrawn.

### Someone with bulimia nervosa may:

- go to the bathroom right after every meal
- take diet pills or laxatives
- over-exercise (even in bad weather, or when hurt/tired)
- have bloodshot eyes, swollen cheeks/jaw, or tooth and gum problems
- be depressed, angry, or withdrawn.