

I Think My Loved One Has an Eating Disorder

Eating disorders often go untreated because friends, family and partners don't have the confidence to confront the individual. They often have a feeling that something is wrong, but they aren't yet sure if the situation warrants outside help.

Here are some signs and symptoms of anorexia and bulimia. Both men and women are affected by eating disorders, but the majority of sufferers are females age 18-24. If you recognize several of these signs, it's time to speak to a professional who specializes in treating eating disorders. Please call us at 866-771-0861 toll-free.

What you might observe:

1. Dramatic weight loss in a relatively short period of time. Drawn appearance in the face and rapid loss of breast tissue.
2. Baggy clothing or dressing in layers. This hides body shape/weight loss and keeps the individual warm when there's too little body fat.
3. Unusual behaviors at the table, such as:
 - Shifting the food around on the plate to look like the food has been eaten
 - Cutting food into tiny pieces
 - Making sure the fork avoids contact with the lips (using teeth to scrap food off the fork or spoon)
 - Chewing food and spitting it out, not swallowing it
 - Dropping food into a napkin, then later throwing it away or feeding it to a household pet
 - Frequent trips to the bathroom immediately following meals. You may hear water running in the bathroom for a long period of time to hide the sound of vomiting
4. Hair loss
5. Excessive exercise, particularly running or cardio machines or classes
6. Exercising at odd times of the day, continuing to exercise when sick or injured
7. Pale or "grey" appearance to the skin
8. Thin nails with peeling layers
9. Puffy cheeks, this is a result of swollen glands from frequent vomiting
10. Bruised or callused knuckles, bloodshot or broken blood vessels in the eyes, light bruising under the eyes and on the cheeks
11. No longer buys/uses feminine hygiene products, indicating a loss of the menstrual cycle
12. Increase in mood swings and/or signs of depression
13. Loss of sexual desire or increase in sexually impulsive behavior (promiscuity)
14. Insomnia or poor sleeping habits

What you may find:

1. Diet pills, laxatives, ipecac syrup or enemas in the bathroom or bedroom
2. Food in strange places like closets, suitcases, basement
3. A “food diary” or lists of foods eaten
4. Internet browser favorites or history showing weight loss sites
5. Books about weight loss, dieting and eating disorders
6. Hidden sweaty workout clothes from gym visits you didn’t know about

What you may hear:

1. Always talking about weight and complaining about being fat, or being terrified of becoming fat
2. Obsession with calories, carbohydrate and fat content in foods
3. Self-deprecating comments about how stupid and fat the individual is. Demeaning self-labels like “pig” and “disgusting”
4. Always says they “just ate” or has plans to eat when they go next. Often cooks elaborate meals for family and friends.
5. Complains of constipation or diarrhea (starvation, laxative and diuretic use upsets normal digestion)
6. Unusual focus on acceptance and approval from others
7. Never satisfied they have done something “right”— perfectionist tendencies