

What are Eating Disorders?



Eating Disorders

- Are serious medical illnesses that affect how people eat and how they feel about food
- Often involve intense anxieties about weight and body shape
- May involve
 - » Weight loss, weight gain, or no changes in weight
 - » Eating very little or avoiding certain foods
 - » Eating large amounts in a short time (binge eating)
 - » Trying to “get rid of” food by vomiting or misusing laxatives (purging)
 - » Exercising compulsively
 - » Social withdrawal (avoiding people/places due to food)
 - » Changes in personality and mood (irritability, depression)
- Are often invisible — you can’t tell if a person has an eating disorder by how they look
- Are medical illnesses with biological roots — not choices or phases



Types of Eating Disorders

- **Anorexia Nervosa** involves a person limiting the amount of food they eat and having an unhealthy low weight. The actions are driven by a fear of gaining weight and concern about body image.
- **Bulimia Nervosa** involves cycles of binge eating and behaviors aimed at preventing weight gain, such as vomiting, fasting, misuse of laxatives, or compulsive exercise. Individuals with bulimia may be slightly underweight, normal weight, or overweight.
- **Binge Eating Disorder** involves frequent episodes of binge eating where the person has a sense of loss of control over their eating. The person often binges alone and experiences feelings of embarrassment, guilt, and distress.
- **Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (AFRID)** involves a person significantly limiting the types of food they eat, resulting in weight loss or malnutrition. The food restriction may be driven by fear of consequences (such as choking) or sensory sensitivities. It is not driven by concern about body image or weight.

Who is affected?

Eating disorders:

- Impact about 9% of people at some point in their lives, and are on the rise
- Are more common in girls/women and most often start in the teen years or early adulthood
- Can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or racial/ethnic identity

Treatment

- Effective treatment is available. Early identification and treatment are important for lasting recovery.
- Behavioral interventions are most effective. They help people normalize unhealthy eating and weight control behaviors and challenge irrational thoughts.
 - » Cognitive behavioral therapy
 - » Interpersonal therapy
 - » Family-based treatment
- Recovery takes a team, including medical and mental health professionals, family, friends, and other social supports.

How to help a loved one

- Be empathic, but firm.
- Identify signs or behaviors you are concerned about. Warning signs can include:
 - » [Refusing previously enjoyed foods](#)
 - » [Avoiding eating in front of others](#)
 - » [Using the bathroom immediately after meals](#)
 - » [Exercising compulsively/having to exercise in order to eat](#)
 - » [Fearing weight gain](#)
- Help locate a treatment provider and offer to go with them. More information: [Get Help for Eating Disorders: Screening & Support | NEDA](#)
- Be prepared for them to be uncertain or ambivalent about seeking treatment.



Read more: [Psychiatry.org - Eating Disorders](#)

Watch on APA YouTube: [What are Eating Disorders?](#)