

## Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions characterized by severe disturbances to a person's eating habits and an obsession with one's body shape and weight. Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. Eating disorders can cause serious health problems and should be treated immediately.

## Signs & Symptoms

Since there are many different eating disorders, the signs of an eating disorder may present differently in each person. Below are the most common eating disorders and symptoms to look for:

- **Anorexia Nervosa** – Characterized by extremely restricted eating, low body weight, a fear of gaining weight, and a distorted perception of weight and their own body.
- **Bulimia Nervosa** – Characterized by binge eating and purging food through vomiting to avoid extra calories, usually accompanied by a chronically inflamed and sore throat, worn tooth enamel or decaying teeth due to excessive exposure to stomach acid, regular intestinal distress or other gastrointestinal issues, and electrolyte imbalance.
- **Binge-Eating Disorder** – Characterized by eating extremely large portions of food in a short amount of time, continuing to eat while full or not hungry until one is uncomfortably full, eating fast during an episode, eating alone or in secret.

## Diagnosis & Treatment

An eating disorder can be difficult to manage or overcome by yourself. Unfortunately, many people with eating disorders do not think they need treatment. If you are worried about a loved one, urge them to talk to a doctor. Even if your loved one will not acknowledge having an eating disorder, you can open the door by expressing concern and a desire to listen. Eating disorders are diagnosed based on identifying the symptoms and analyzing the eating habits of an individual. A doctor or mental health professional may also perform a physical or psychological exam to pinpoint a diagnosis. Treatment plans depend on the specific eating disorder, with most plans utilizing family-based therapy and cognitive based therapy, along with medication to help with feelings of depression or anxiety.

Sources – National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml> and Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/eating-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20353603>