

INFORMATION ABOUT EATING DISORDERS

Different types of Eating Disorders

There are many forms of eating disorders; *anorexia and bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and eating disorders not otherwise specified (EDNOS)*.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia is characterised by:

- severe restriction of food intake
- loss of body weight to an unhealthy level
- loss of menstrual periods (female)
- an intense fear of getting fat, and/or losing control of eating
- often a disturbed body image-still regarding self as fat despite being quite underweight.

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia is characterised by:

- An over-preoccupation with food and weight resulting in out of control eating patterns such as:
- eating binges which involve the consumption of large amounts of food. These usually occur secretly, and the person may feel a sense of loss of control or shame.
- attempts to compensate for binges and avoid weight gain by one or more of the following unhealthy measures: self induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, fluid or diet pills, excessive exercise, periods of strict dieting.

Binge Eating Disorder

Binge Eating Disorder is characterised by:

- Periods of binge eating without compensatory behaviour such as vomiting or excessive exercise.

Other Eating Disorders

There is a wide range of other disordered eating patterns and not all people with eating disorders have a clear cut diagnosis. For example, anorexia and bulimia may co-exist, or one may develop into the other, or some people may have a very restricted food intake without fulfilling all of the criteria for anorexia nervosa. These conditions are no less serious; intervention and attention are still required.

Who is at risk?

- Eating disorders are most commonly experienced by adolescent females and young women, but also occur in both males (link to

further information), people of all ages and across all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

- Generalisations are not always useful but some of the common themes among people with eating disorders may include:
- low self esteem
- need to seek the approval of others
- difficulties in expressing needs and feelings, including anger and anxiety
- perfectionism
- difficulties being assertive with others
- people who diet

Causes

There is no single cause of an eating disorder. It is currently agreed that eating disorders are multi factorial ? with social/cultural, psychological, biological, family and precipitating factors all playing a part in varying degrees for different people.

Contributing factors may include:

- Social/Cultural Factors
- idealisation of thinness
- focus on appearance
- weight loss, fashion, fitness cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries etc
- media representations of happy, thin, successful people
- socialisation of women and men
- Family Factors

There is no typical family ?type,? however, some family characteristics may need to be addressed during the recovery process such as:

- communication within the family/how family deals with feelings
- attitudes around the importance of appearance, achievement etc
- parent?s own body image/dieting behaviour

Biological Factors

The importance of biological factors is still being researched. Possible factors include:

- predisposition to imbalances in serotonin (a neuro-transmitter involved in mood and brain function)
- reduced blood flow to the temporal lobe

- fasting, over-exercise and vomiting may affect chemicals involved in mood control
- Individual Factors
- Not everyone exposed to cultural and family factors develops an eating disorder, therefore individual factors play an important role. Again, there is no one single cause, but some common experiences such as:
 - people with high personal expectations
 - belief that love is dependent on being 'perfect'
 - self-esteem issues
 - high need for approval from others
 - social anxiety
 - people who find it difficult to express their own needs
 - difficulty being assertive
 - personality factors may be affected by malnutrition

Precipitating Factors

Often the onset of an eating disorder can be triggered by an external factor such as:

- life crisis - family loss, friendship loss, moving to a new home, school or job, personal disappointment etc
- accumulation of minor stressors; the impact of cultural, family or individual factors may intensify during periods of stress
- dieting ([link to further information](#))
- history of abuse
- uncertainty

Warning Signs

It is not uncommon for an eating disorder to go undetected. The symptoms of the eating disorder may be the first indications that the person is experiencing psychological problems and distress. The signs associated with bulimia can be more difficult to detect as the person may be of normal or fluctuating body weight. Some people exhibit many signs of a disorder, others only a few.

Possible early warning signs of eating disorders

- dieting or overeating
- weight loss or change, mostly due to dieting, but sometimes from a stressful situation or illness
- preoccupation with body appearance or weight
- loss or disturbance of menstrual periods (females)
- sensitivity to the cold
- faintness, dizziness, fatigue
- increased mood changes, irritability

- social withdrawal/isolation
- anxiety, depression
- increased interest in preparing food for others
- mental list of 'good' and 'bad' foods
- obsessive rituals, ie: only drinking out of a certain cup, eating certain foods on certain days
- wearing baggy clothes/change in clothing style
- excessive or fluctuating exercise patterns
- avoidance of social situations involving food
- making frequent excuses not to eat
- slow eating/eating with teaspoons
- fast eating
- hoarding food
- rearranging food on plate
- disappearance of large amounts of food, food wrappers in bins
- feelings of being out of control with food
- trips to the bathroom after meals

Physical & Psychological effects

- Food Restriction and Starvation
- severe sensitivity to the cold
- reduced bone density and osteoporosis
- fertility problems/infertility
- kidney dysfunction
- reduced metabolic rate leading to slow heart rate, low blood pressure, reduced body temperature and bluish coloured extremities
- growth of down-like body hair
- headaches
- changes in hair, skin and nails (dry, brittle)
- cardiac irregularities
- muscle wasting or weakness
- constipation or diarrhoea
- hormonal irregularities
- oedema (retention of body fluid giving a 'puffy' appearance)
- easy bruising
- anaemia (iron deficiency)
- fainting
- heartburn
- abdominal pain
- stunting of height/growth
- hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels) which can cause confusion, illogical thinking, coma, shakiness, irritability and fatigue
- reduced concentration, memory and thinking ability

Vomiting can cause:

- erosion of tooth enamel
- sore throat, indigestion and heartburn
- abdominal pain and bloating
- enlarged salivary glands
- electrolyte imbalance resulting in cardiac arrhythmia, muscle fatigue and cramps
- Laxative misuse can cause:
 - bowel problems, constipation, diarrhoea, cramps
 - dehydration which impairs body functioning
 - weakening of bowel which may lead to difficulty with bowel movements
 - bleeding which can lead to anaemia
 - bowel disease
 - electrolyte imbalance

Emotional and Psychological Consequences of Eating Disorders

Eating disorders place tremendous emotional strain on people. Left unattended eating disorders can destroy the quality of a person's life and are potentially life threatening.

- anxiety, anxiety disorders
- depression
- obsessive behaviour
- social isolation/withdrawal
- irritability/moodiness
- difficulty with relationships
- suicidal thoughts or behaviour
- drug misuse
- poor quality of life
- lack of assertiveness
- sensitivity to criticism
- guilt, self-dislike
- impaired achievement at school, work etc

Links to Other Sites

Other Australian Eating Disorders Information Services:

Victoria:

Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria
<http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/>
edfv@eatingdisorders.org.au

Victorian Centre of Excellence in Eating Disorders (CEED) provides a range of services for health practitioners including training and a discussion list www.ceed.org.au ceed@mh.org.au

Queensland:

Eating Disorders Association of Queensland
www.uq.net.au/eda eda.inc@uq.net.au The comprehensive *Links* page on this site lists a range of both Australian and International websites relating to eating disorders and body image. This site also hosts a chat room called EdTalk

ISIS - Centre for Women's Action on Eating Issues <http://www.isis.org.au/women@isis.org.au>

South Australia:

Eating Disorders Association of South Australia
www.communitywebs.org/edasa edasa@interno.de.on.net

New South Wales:

Eating Disorders Foundation of New South Wales. This site also hosts a chat room.
www.edf.org.au edf@edf.org.au

New South Wales Centre of Eating & Dieting Disorders (CEDD) <http://www.cedd.org.au/info@cedd.org.au>

Other useful websites:

Australian **chat rooms:** [Eating Disorders Foundation of New South Wales](#), [Eating Disorders Association of Queensland](#)

beyondblue - the national depression initiative
<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Depressionet <http://www.depressionet.com.au/>

Overseas Eating Disorders Associations websites:

United Kingdom: Eating Disorders Association of the UK (EDAUK) <http://www.edauk.com/>

USA: National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)
<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

Website information

Do I Have an eating disorder
Management of Eating disorders
Why diets don't work
Stories of recovery
Health practitioners, Victoria