



Understanding Eating Disorders

Millions of Americans struggle with eating disorders, and body image issues. Eating disorders are real, treatable medical illnesses that often co-exist with other illnesses such as depression, substance abuse, or anxiety disorders. [February 26 - March 4 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week](#), meant to raise awareness, dispel the myths around eating disorders, get people screened, and start journeys to healing. Unfortunately, stigma and stereotypes prevent many from getting the help and support they need.

Signs of Common Eating Disorders

Research suggests that about 1% of female teens have anorexia, and about 4% of college-aged women have bulimia.[1] Anorexia and bulimia primarily affect people in their teens and twenties, with 90% being female. Among other factors, this gender difference may reflect social pressures for women to be thin.

Anorexia: People with anorexia see themselves as overweight, even when they are clearly underweight. Eating, food, and weight control become obsessions, and the person often has an intense fear of gaining weight. Anorexia can lead to serious health problems and even death from starvation.

Bulimia: People with bulimia have episodes of binge-eating followed by forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviors. Many people with bulimia are of normal weight but are unhappy with their body size and shape. Bulimic behavior - bingeing and purging - is often done in secret. Health consequences can include chronic sore throat, worn tooth enamel from vomiting, acid reflux disorder, and other gastrointestinal problems.

Binge eating disorder: Unlike individuals with bulimia, people who binge-eat do not purge or fast, but feel out of control with their eating. Binge-eaters are often overweight or obese, and at higher risk of developing diabetes and other health conditions.

[1] <https://www.anred.com/stats.html>



Risk Factors

Risk factors for developing an eating disorder include psychological risk factors such as anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and perfectionism.

Biological risk factors include having a close family member with an eating disorder, family history of depression, anxiety and/or addiction, the presence of certain food allergies and Type 1 diabetes. Cultural factors, such as size and weight prejudice, are also thought to play a role.

Treatment

Certain forms of psychotherapy, or talk therapy, nutritional counseling, and medication are effective for many eating disorders. Treatment plans are tailored to the individual's specific needs. Click here for a [Parent Toolkit](#) on eating disorders and how to support and get help for a loved one with an eating disorder.

Are you concerned about a friend or family member's health? If you, or someone you know, is interested in addiction recovery services, mental health care for children or adults, or primary care, contact InterCommunity. To receive services at any of our Hartford or East Hartford locations, please call 860-569-5900.

