

Society's Disease

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A girl is getting ready to step on the scales. She's nervous about her weight so she stuffed her underwear with rolls of coins and has been drinking glass after glass of water. She wants people to think she is maintaining or even gaining weight. She's hiding a problem

Over eight million people in the United States have an eating disorder. Eating disorders usually start in the teens but may begin as early as age eight. Ninety percent of the people are women. In fact, the typical profile of a person with an eating disorder is Middle-class, Caucasian female. Everyone's question is... what causes eating disorders? There is no answer to this question. "Most people think it has to do with being thin and wanting to lose weight but thinking they're fat doesn't usually have anything to do with it", says Carolyn Mosley, a marriage and family therapist at Coastal Plain Hospital and Counseling Center. Possible causes of eating disorders include feeling stressed out or upset about something in their life, or feeling the need to be "in control". Low self-esteem can contribute as well. "Having low self-esteem forms when you're a young child. Many people with eating disorders have been sexually abused or have had some sort of emotional disturbance, says Mosley. Society also put a lot of pressure on

people to be thin. This pressure can contribute as well. Recent studies on eating disorders have discovered they could be biological. Research implicates genes and brain chemistry. New insights into the roots of eating disorders are helping researchers piece together how the disorders evolve and may lead to improved treatments.

The two main types of eating disorders are anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia. People with Anorexia are obsessed with being thin. They don't want to eat and are afraid of gaining weight. This fear causes them to become obsessed about how many calories they take in or how much fat is in their food. They take diet pills, laxatives or water pills to lose weight. They may exercise too much. Anorexics usually think they're fat even though they're very thin; so thin that they look as though they're sick. If anorexia isn't treated it could cause stomach and heart problems, irregular periods or no periods, fine hair all over the body, including the face and dry or scaly skin. Bulimia is eating a lot of food at once, called bingeing, and then throwing up or using laxatives, called purgeing. After a binge, some bulimics fast, or over exercise, to keep from gaining weight. People with Bulimia may also use water pills, laxatives, or diet pills to "control" their weight.

They often try to hide their bingeing and purgeing. They may hide food for binges. "What people don't realize about the binge-purge technique is that you basically stay the same weight while ruining your insides", says Mosley. Bulimia can cause stomach and heart problems, kidney problems, and dental problems from throwing up stomach acid and dehydration. Scars and calluses could be found on the hands due to sticking their fingers down their throats during the purge process. Both of the disorders have warning signs; including, unnatural concern about the body, even if the person is not overweight, obsession with calories, fat grams and food, use of any medications to keep from gaining weight.

More serious warning signs may be harder to notice because people who have an eating disorder try to keep it secret. Watch for throwing up after meals, refusing to eat or lying about how much was eaten, fainting, overexercis-

ing, not having periods, increased anxiety about weight, and denying that there is anything wrong.

It's healthy to watch what you eat and to exercise. What isn't healthy is worrying all the time about your weight and what you eat! Eating disorders are serious and even deadly if left untreated. If you or, someone you know is suffering from an eating disorder, it is important to talk to a professional as soon as possible. The following are some resources that will help you find the information and support you need:

**Bulimia/Anorexia
Self Help Hotline:**

800-448-3000

**Eating Disorders
Awareness and Pre-
vention (EDAP):**

800-931-2237

or

www.edap.org

**Eating Disorders
Recovery Online:**

www.edrecovery.com



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