



Recognizing eating disorders

Millions of people in the United States have an eating disorder. More than 60 percent are female. Most are between the ages of 15 and 24. Eating disorders can lead to death. This may be from starvation or a heart attack. Or even suicide. Eating disorders are hard to understand. Family members may find it hard to cope with the illness. The good news is that eating disorders can be treated. And the earlier the better.

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is an illness. It's when a person's eating habits are not normal. A person with an eating disorder may eat too much or too little. Some binge eat then purge. This can harm a person's health. The three most common eating disorders are:

- Anorexia nervosa
- Bulimia nervosa
- Binge eating

Eating disorders may be caused by factors such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Poor personal relationships

How thinness is shown in the media is thought to play a role too. And some studies show that biological factors may lead to eating disorders.

Spotting the warning signs

Many people worry about weight. So it is hard to tell if a person has an eating disorder. Symptoms vary. They depend on the person. And the type of disorder. But there are warning signs. They include:

- A rapid loss of weight
- Eating habits that are not normal:
 - Dieting too much
 - Not eating in front of others
 - Secret binging
- Exercising too much
- Having a fear of getting fat, even if thin
- Not being active due to weight concerns
- Spending a lot of time in the bathroom
- Problems with menstruation in women

For help, talk to a healthcare professional. Get help right away if there is a crisis! Always call 911 in an emergency.

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