

## Tip Sheet: Understanding Eating Disorders

When you become so preoccupied with food and weight issues that you find it harder and harder to focus on other aspects of your life, it may be an early sign of an eating disorder. Studies suggest that 1 in 20 people will be affected at some point in their lives. Ultimately without treatment, eating disorders can take over a person's life and lead to serious, potentially fatal medical complications. Although eating disorders are commonly associated with women, men can develop them as well.

Eating disorders are a group of related conditions that cause serious emotional and physical problems. Each condition involves extreme food and weight issues; however, each has unique symptoms that separate it from the others.

### Anorexia Nervosa

A person with anorexia will deny themselves food to the point of self-starvation as they obsess about weight loss. With anorexia, a person will deny hunger and refuse to eat, practice purging behaviors or exercise to the point of exhaustion as they attempt to limit, eliminate or "burn" calories. Anorexia can take a heavy physical toll.

### Bulimia Nervosa

Someone living with bulimia will feel out of control when bingeing on very large amounts of food during short periods of time, and then desperately try to rid themselves of the extra calories using forced vomiting, abusing laxatives or excessive exercise. This becomes a repeating cycle that controls many aspects of the person's life and has a very negative effect both emotionally and physically. Like anorexia, bulimia will inflict physical damage.

### Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

A person with BED loses control over their eating and eats a large amount of food in a short period of time. They may also eat large amounts of food even when they aren't hungry or after they are uncomfortably full. This may cause them to feel embarrassed, disgusted, depressed or guilty about their behavior. After an episode of binge eating, an individual with BED does not attempt to purge or exercise excessively and may be normal weight, overweight or obese.

### Treatment Options

Factors that may be involved in developing an eating disorder include genetics, environment, peer pressure and emotional health. Eating disorders can affect all types of people. However, there are certain risk factors that put some people at greater risk for developing an eating disorder.

Eating disorders are managed using a variety of techniques. Treatments will vary depending on the type of disorder, but will generally include the following:

- Psychotherapy, such as talk therapy or behavioral therapy
- Medicine, such as antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs, to treat co-occurring illness like depression or anxiety
- Nutritional counseling and weight restoration monitoring
- Family counseling