

## EATING DISORDERS

David Lowenstein, Ph.D.  
Psychologist

### *What is an Eating Disorder?*

- Extreme expression of a range of weight and food issues experienced by both males and females
- The “eating” in eating disorders refers to a set of eating habits, weight management practices and attitudes about weight and body shape
- The ‘disorder’ means that the eating related attitudes and behaviors result in a:
  - Loss of self-control and other forms of behavioral inefficiency
  - Obsession, anxiety, guilt and other forms of misery
  - Alienation from self and others
  - Physiological imbalances which are potentially life-threatening
- The types of Eating Disorders are:
  1. **ANOREXIA NERVOSA:**
    - Refusal to maintain weight at or above a minimally normal weight for height and age
    - Intense fear of weight gain
    - Distorted body image
    - In females, loss of 3 consecutive menstrual periods
    - Extreme concern with body weight
    - These psychological characteristics contribute to drastic weight loss and defiant refusal to maintain a healthy weight for age and height.
    - Food, calories, weight and weight management dominate the person’s life and woe to anyone who tries to disrupt this private system
  2. **BULIMIA NERVOSA:**
    - Repeated episodes of bingeing and purging
    - Feeling out of control during a binge
    - Purging after a binge (vomiting, use of laxatives, diet pills, excessive exercising or fasting)
    - Frequent dieting
    - Extreme concern with body weight and shape
    - This disorder characterized by self-perpetuating and self-defeating cycles of binge eating and purging
    - During binge the person consumes a large amount of food in a rapid, automatic and helpless fashion, this anesthetizes the hunger, anger and other feelings, but eventually creates a physical discomfort and anxiety about weight gain
    - Thus the person purges the food eaten, usually by induced vomiting or laxatives
  3. **COMPULSIVE OVEREATING:**
    - Characterized primarily by periods of impulsive gorging or continuous eating
    - While there may not be any purging, there are sporadic fasts or repetitive dieting

### *Eating Disorders Are Widespread and Destructive:*

- Seven million women and 1 million men; children and adults, all segments of society
- Victims lose the ability to function effectively – great personal loss and loss to society

### *Age at Onset of Illness:*

- 10% report onset at ten years old or younger
- 33% report onset between 11-15 years old
- 43% report onset between 16-20 years old

*Duration of Illness/Mortality:*

- 77% report duration of illness ranges from 1 to 15 years
- 30% report duration from 1 to 5 years
- 31% report duration from 6 to 10 years
- 16% report duration from 11 to 15 years
- 6% of the eating disorder patients die
- Only 50% report being cured

**DO YOU HAVE AN EATING DISORDER?**

**TAKE THIS QUIZ**

**Simply answer 'YES' or 'NO' to each of the 15 questions:**

1. I worry about gaining weight.
2. I am preoccupied with losing weight.
3. I frequently diet or feel the need to be on a diet.
4. My mood depends on my weight (e.g., if I gain one pound I am depressed, irritable, etc.)
5. I feel bad about myself if I gain weight.
6. If I gain one pound, I worry that I will continue to gain weight.
7. I think of certain foods as either "good" or "bad" and feel guilty about eating "bad" foods.
8. I use food to comfort myself.
9. When I am eating I feel like I have lost control.
10. I spend a significant amount of time thinking about food and when I will eat.
11. I try to hide how much I eat.
12. I have thoughts about (or have) self-induced vomiting as a means of weight control.
13. After eating, I may use laxatives, diuretics, exercise, etc., to prevent weight gain.
14. I am dissatisfied with my body size and shape.
15. I eat until I am stuffed.

**If you answered YES to 5 or more of these questions you may have a Eating Disorder**

**THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF HELPING SOMEONE RECOVER FROM AN EATING DISORDER:**

**DO'S:**

- DO gently encourage him/her to eat properly
- DO express your love and support
- DO try and understand, even though this seems impossible
- DO take time to listen, even though the talk may seem trivial or insignificant to you
- DO try to see how she/he ( and each family member) perceives the situation
- DO realize that she/he is terrified of gaining weight and being fat even though she/he may actually be underweight. These irrational fears are real to her/him
- DO emphasize the positive and all her/his good characteristics and compliment her/him on all the things they do right
- DO encourage her/him to accept support and honestly express their feelings
- DO talk honestly and sincerely, with love and understanding
- DO recognize that other, non-food, factors are at the heart of the problem
- DO help her/him find someone to support them and how understands what they are going through
- DO realize that, while she/he may have help from others, they must want to get better and they need to love themselves first

**DON'TS:**

- DON'T try and force her/him to eat or stop exercising
- DON'T get angry and punish them
- DON'T be impatient ( this is really tough) and DON'T lecture
- DON'T be too busy, even if you have to give up important things
- DON'T jump to conclusions or see things only through your eyes and mind
- DON'T make them feel bad or guilty for having an eating disorder and DON'T spy on her/him
- DON'T place the blame on anyone
- DON'T be afraid to talk about problems
- DON'T pretend it will all just go away
- DON'T expect an instant recovery
- DON'T let her/him feel they are the only one with this problem