

Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia

Anorexia nervosa means following a diet or not eating to an extent that a person loses more than 15% of his ideal body weight. The disease is characterized by a pathological fear or irrational belief of being overweight and compulsive rituals to lose weight.

Bulimia: It is also called bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder and is defined as eating a lot of food in a short period to then force oneself to vomit or use excessive laxatives. Both disorders usually begin in the early or middle adolescence.

About 90% of people with anorexia nervosa are women and about 0.7% of all women in the United States, for example, have this condition.

Bulimia is much more common. Studies carried out on female high school and college students found that 4.5% to 18% of students suffer from bulimia.

Like many mental disorders, anorexia and bulimia seem to have genetic causes and are found at higher rates in certain families.

Anorexia and bulimia may cause many serious complications, including hormonal disorders, complete absence of menstruation, osteoporosis and imbalance in the levels of many salts and therefore serious heart rate problems and may even lead to death, God forbid.

Symptoms:

Patients begin to cut out certain foods, claim to eat some meals and sometimes they develop compulsive over-exercising. They may feel obese, although they may be in fact thin. They may also switch between not eating at all and binge eating. Menstruation may stop.

As their weight declines, their health deteriorates and the skin looks pale and yellowish. Other symptoms include brittle nails and hair, constipation, anemia, swollen joints, constant feeling of cold, unhealed ulcers and difficulty concentrating and thinking.

Bulimic patients are also afraid of gaining weight, but unlike people with anorexia, they often realize that their behavior is abnormal and may become depressed after eating a fatty meal. The health consequences can be severe, including fatigue, laxity, constipation, swellings, swollen salivary glands, eroded tooth enamel or sore throat due to vomiting. Overuse of laxatives can also cause serious loss of fluids and minerals.

Treatment:

Treatment of both disorders works best if started as early as possible. If you suspect that you or someone you know has anorexia or bulimia, seek medical help as soon as possible. Your doctor may recommend admission if you weigh 30% below your ideal weight or less.

Cognitive therapy seeks to convince people that their belief of being overweight is wrong and that their attempts to lose weight are irrational. Behavioral therapy involves the development of communication with patients and encouraging them to gain weight in return for certain promised rewards.



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Family therapy is important to help families understand the nature of the disease. Drugs may be prescribed for those with depression or compulsive behavior. Note that many young women have either anorexia or bulimia.

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