

Eating Disorders

There is a commonly held misconception that eating disorders are a lifestyle choice. Eating disorders are actually serious and often fatal illnesses that are associated with severe disturbances in people's eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. Preoccupation with food, body weight, and shape may also signal an eating disorder.

COMMON EATING DISORDERS:

- » **Anorexia nervosa:** When a person sees themselves as overweight, even when they are dangerously underweight, they may weigh themselves repeatedly, severely restrict the amount of food they eat, often exercise excessively, and/or may force themselves to vomit or use laxatives to lose weight
- » **Bulimia nervosa:** Recurrent and frequent episodes of eating large amounts of food and feeling a lack of control over these episodes, followed by behavior that compensates for the overeating such as forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviors
- » **Binge-eating disorder:** When a person loses control over his or her eating, unlike bulimia nervosa, periods of binge-eating are not followed by purging, excessive exercise, or fasting (as a result, people with binge-eating disorder often are overweight or obese)

TREATMENT for EATING DISORDERS:

It is important to seek treatment early for eating disorders. People with eating disorders are at higher risk for suicide and medical complications. People with eating disorders can often have other mental disorders (such as depression or anxiety) or problems with substance use.

Treatment plans are tailored to individual needs and may include one or more of the following:

- Individual, group, and/or family psychotherapy
- Medical care and monitoring
- Nutritional counseling
- Medications

Complete recovery is possible.
Visit uab.edu/eacc or contact the EACC at 205-934-2281 for resources and support.

— Adapted from National Institute of Mental Health

