

# Hope & Healing

## Eating Disorders Facts

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

### Introduction

Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are emotional disorders of disturbed body images. Persons with anorexia feel that they must starve themselves. Sometimes this is so severe that they must be hospitalized to save them from serious malnutrition.

Person with bulimia, however, may eat excessively in binges and then get rid of the food by vomiting or by taking laxatives. They may be thin, fat, or normal weight.

Both conditions are more common in women and usually develop during the teen years or early adulthood. Anorexia may be present in 1% of young girls while bulimia may exist in up to 15% of college women.

### Who's at Risk?

Young people who suffer from eating disorders do not usually run the streets or do drugs. They are usually intelligent, accomplished, and attractive young women between the ages of 12 and 20 from black and white middle class homes. They often attend church and outwardly seem to have made good use of their personal lives. They constantly talk about looking and feeling fat even though they may be 15 to 25 percent under their ideal body weight.

### The Emotional and Psychological Background

Young persons who develop eating disorders tend to be "people pleasers." They are perfectionists and achieve high

grades — perfect at home and at school. Inwardly, though, they have poor self-image and low self-esteem.

When they reach adolescence their minds and bodies are moving toward independence but their parents are often overprotective and rigid and have poor communication skills to resolve conflict or allow the expression of emotion. So the young person turns to one thing they can control and manipulate — their weight. Their actions are a cry for help.

### Characteristics of Anorexia

The following are excellent indicators to use in determining whether your child is showing signs of anorexia:

- An intense fear of becoming overweight. But the talk of being overweight continues as more and more weight is lost.
- Talk of "feeling fat" even when the body is obviously thin.
- A loss of 25% of original weight. For teens this will mean a failure to gain weight as they grow, plus loss of additional weight.
- A refusal to keep the weight up even when pleaded with.
- There is no physical illness to explain the weight loss.

There are two thoughts about what causes anorexia. First, a girl approaching the age of sexual development requires independence, individualization, and a sense of her own identity separate from her family. If she is denied the opportunity to grow socially or psychologically, she regresses to the "stage" of a child requiring special attention from her parents, like any sick child would. Or, anorexia may allow her to control her life in an area that her

parents can't manipulate (her weight).

Persons with anorexia typically follow the same routine for eating each meal. They may cook an elaborate meal for their parents but put small portions on their own plates. Then they divide these portions into still smaller portions. After eating a small amount they will exercise strenuously for quite a long time.

### Health Risks of Anorexia

At one extreme anorexia causes death by starvation. Other health risks are:

- **Heart Problems.** A low heart rate, low blood pressure, an abnormal heart rhythm and heart failure due to muscle weakness.
- **Osteoporosis.** Anorexia can stop menstrual periods because of decreased estrogen production. Decreased estrogen makes thin bones that break easily. This is osteoporosis.
- **Other Illnesses.** Anemia, low white blood cell counts, and kidney and liver problems.
- **Brain Changes.** The brain shrinks when it isn't nourished well. In turn there are problems in concentration, temper tantrums, seeing persons and hearing voices and being suspicious of the acts of others.

Many of these problems can be reversed when normal eating is resumed. But, if the anorexia lasts for years, 25% won't begin menstrual periods again, nor will they regain their normal weight. Between 33 and 50% also suffer some psychological problems. Note: The earlier parents become aware that problems are present and get help, the better the chances of avoiding damage that cannot be reversed.

### **Characteristics of Bulimia** \_\_\_\_\_

Persons with bulimia will plan their strategy to eat sweet foods of smooth texture that can be swallowed quickly. They eat in secret and the food is gulped down fast with little chewing. They can consume 3,000 to 4,000 calories in one-and-a-half hours. The following are indicators to use in determining whether your child is showing signs of Bulimia:

- Eating large amounts in secret and in short periods of time.
- Look for three of these five behaviors:
  1. Eating binges of high calorie, easily digested foods.
  2. Attempts to hide eating activity.
  3. Abdominal pain, sleep, self-induced vomiting, or a social activity following an eating binge.
  4. Repeated attempts to lose weight by severely regulating body weight through vomiting episodes.
  5. Frequent weight fluctuations of ten pounds or more due to eating binges and vomiting.
- Persons with bulimia are aware that their eating patterns are abnormal and they fear being unable to stop.
- Depressed moods and quiet and self-blaming thoughts frequently follow binges.

### **Prevention and Early Detection of Eating Disorders** \_\_\_\_\_

Help your children avoid eating disorders by encouraging them to pursue goals other than being thin. We send children the wrong message when we portray thinness as a symbol of achievement, success, and independence.

Teenagers normally worry about their looks and they can be preoccupied with their usage from time to time. If this phase extends past late adolescence or if your teenager exhibits specific behaviors like those listed below, contact a center that can help you motivate your child for an evaluation and treatment:

- Marked weight loss without explanation.
- Rituals as eating patterns.
- Unreasonable exercise — especially after meals.
- Finding laxative or ipecac containers that might indicate induced vomiting or diarrhea to get rid of food.

### **Summary** \_\_\_\_\_

Be encouraged to look at your children and their habits. If you find the symptoms given here, be determined to get help. There are lots of resources for any child who is too thin or too fat. If your own attitude about food needs adjusting, be willing to admit it. It is at this level that hope for your child with an eating disorder can begin. When we adjust our beliefs, our children often adjust theirs. Unless you begin at the beginning, the results of any change in behavior and the efforts of others who are committed to help you may only be temporary.

## **Awaken the Miracles Within You**

### **The Miracle of Intelligence**

God has given each of us as much intelligence as we need. Our use of what we have, however, is inconsistent and spotty.

Think about it. Wouldn't the world be a better place if each of us:

- Ate and drank intelligently
- Read intelligently
- Spent money intelligently
- Used the power of the Bible intelligently
- Always thought things through intelligently
- Evaluated what we hear intelligently
- Used our faith intelligently
- Used our intelligence to solve problems at work
- Planned our futures with intelligence

Do you know what you want to do or be? If not, wouldn't it be intelligent for you to write down your goals for getting there?

*The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.*