

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Facts about Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are disturbances in our eating behaviors.

They are also feelings of distress and extreme concern about our body image and weight. Eating disorders include unhealthy eating patterns, such as drastically reducing food intake, extreme overeating, and deliberately throwing up.

Eating disorders can cause serious and life-threatening imbalances in the body. They also can:

- Include serious heart conditions that lead to cardiac arrest.
- Co-occur with other illnesses, such as depression, anxiety disorders, and alcohol or other drug addiction.
- Affect males as well as females. The National Institute for Mental Health estimates that 5 to 15% of those with anorexia or bulimia are male, and about 35% of males have binge eating disorders.

The following are three of the most common eating disorders and their symptoms:

- 1. Anorexia Nervosa.** With Anorexia people see themselves as overweight despite their actual body weight. They drastically reduce food intake and have unusual eating habits which include:
 - Avoiding meals or eating a few foods in small amounts
 - Weighing foods
 - Counting calories of everything consumed
 - Weighing themselves constantly
 - Exercising excessively to control weight
- 2. Bulimia Nervosa.** Bulimia involves episodes of binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting or misuse of laxatives. Harmful consequences related to bulimia are:
 - Inflammation of the esophagus
 - Tooth decay and staining
 - Peptic ulcers
 - Electrolyte imbalances
- 3. Binge Eating.** Binge Eating Disorder is not associated with purging behaviors, but the binges are associated with at least three of the following:
 - Eating more rapidly than normal or large amounts of food when not hungry
 - Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
 - Eating alone because of embarrassment over amount of food eaten
 - Feeling disgusted and guilty after overeating

How are eating disorders treated? Eating disorders are most frequently treated with talking therapy, although sometimes medication is helpful. Many people talk to their primary care physician first, who can check on other medical problems and make a referral to a specialist. With treatment, people with eating disorders can live healthy lives.

For more information, contact: The Office of Consumer Partnerships - dbhrconsumerpartnerships@dshs.wa.gov, the [Washington Recovery Help Line](#) at 1-866-789-1511, or the [National Institute of Mental Health](#).

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services – Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery