

COUNSELING CAPSULES

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Eating Disorders

Each year millions of people in the United States are affected by serious and sometimes life-threatening eating disorders. The vast majority - more than 90 percent - are adolescent and young adult women. One reason that women in this age group are particularly vulnerable to eating disorders is their tendency to go on strict diets to achieve an "ideal" figure. Researchers have found that such stringent dieting can play a key role in triggering eating disorders.

EATING DISORDERS TAKE MANY DIFFERENT FORMS

- **Anorexia Nervosa:** People who intentionally starve themselves suffer from an eating disorder called *anorexia nervosa*. The disorder usually begins at puberty and involves extreme weight loss - at least 15% below the individual's normal body weight. Individuals with the disorder often look emaciated but refuse to eat. They are extremely afraid of gaining weight and may resort to vomiting and laxative abuse to lose weight. Signs of this disorder include: excessive weight loss; disruption of the menstrual cycle; extreme sensitivity to cold; fine, downy hair covering the body surface; dull, stringy hair; wearing bulky clothes to hide thinness; and denial of the problem.
- **Bulimia Nervosa:** People with *bulimia nervosa* consume large amounts of food and then rid their bodies of the excess calories by vomiting, abusing laxatives or diuretics, taking diet pills, or exercising obsessively. Some use a combination of all these forms of purging. Because many individuals with bulimia "binge and purge" in secret and maintain normal or above normal body weight, they often hide their problem for years. Signs of bulimia nervosa include: frequent trips to the bathroom, especially after meals; abdominal distention; tooth marks or bruising on the hand (from self-induced vomiting); dental deterioration; dry skin; and swollen salivary glands.
- **Binge Eating Disorder:** An illness that resembles bulimia nervosa is *binge eating disorder*. Like bulimia, the disorder is characterized by episodes of uncontrolled eating or bingeing. However, binge eating disorder differs from bulimia because its sufferers do not purge their bodies of excess food. Most people with this disorder are obese and have a history of weight fluctuations.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF EATING DISORDERS CAN BE SEVERE. One in ten cases of anorexia nervosa leads to death from starvation, cardiac arrest, other medical complications, or suicide. Individuals with bulimia may permanently damage their teeth, bones, kidneys, or heart.

EARLY DIAGNOSIS IS ESSENTIAL. The longer disordered eating patterns persist, the more difficult it is to overcome the disorder and its effects on the body. Family members and friends can help recognize the problem and encourage the individual to seek treatment.

HELP! WHERE TO FIND IT:

University Counseling Center...747-5302
202West Union: 8-7 M-T / 8-5 W-F