



## When Food Becomes A Problem Understanding Eating Disorders

***Eating Disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating include extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding weight and food issues. Secret starving, binge-eating, or the purging of food are all common, as are the feelings of anxiety, depression, guilt and shame, which often accompany eating disorders. In addition, there are serious physical problems that can have life-threatening consequences for females and males with eating disorders.***

### Anorexia Nervosa



Anorexia is a disorder that is characterized by self-starvation. Anorexics generally refuse to eat or eat only a few morsels of food despite being severely underweight. The compulsive need to exercise often accompanies anorexia and can contribute to the dramatic level of weight loss. Many people with anorexia do not see how thin they are becoming and often still “feel fat” even at 80 pounds.

Anorexics usually strive for perfection. A person with anorexia may have low self-esteem and will deny that anything is wrong. They usually resist any attempts for help because gaining weight is viewed as undisciplined and weak. For anorexics, control is key.

***Without treatment, up to 20% of people with serious eating disorders die.***

### Bulimia Nervosa

People with bulimia are involved in a **binge-purge cycle** of trying to control their weight and food intake. Stress usually triggers their purging which may include vomiting, laxative abuse, excessive exercise, fasting, use of diuretics, diet pills and enemas.

Bulimics are usually people that do not feel secure about their own self worth and obsess about their body shape and size. They usually strive for the approval of others while food becomes their only source of comfort. Unlike anorexics, bulimics typically realize they have a problem and are more likely to seek help.

***As many as 10 million females and 1 million males are fighting a life and death battle with an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia. Approximately 25 million more are struggling with binge eating disorders.***

### Compulsive Overeating

Compulsive overeaters use food as a way to cope with stress, emotional conflicts and daily problems. They typically eat in response to **emotional** rather than physical hunger.

Many people will choose “comfort” such as starchy, sweet, salty and fatty foods to fill emotional hunger. Weight management becomes difficult and can cause the person to resort to drastic diets or purging methods to compensate for the excessive food intake. Thus, compulsive overeaters can be at risk for developing bulimia.

### Treatment and Recovery

If you are worried about a friend or family member, remember that it can be difficult for someone with an eating disorder to realize there is a problem. It is important to remain calm and non-judgemental.



Professional counseling is usually successful in assisting those with eating disorders. The harmful eating cycles can be replaced with new techniques to manage needs and feelings.

Eating disorders are treatable but can not be solved overnight, it takes time. Two to three years is not an uncommon amount of time for a person to recover and develop a healthy new relationship with food.

### Additional Resources

Visit these sites for more information on eating disorders:  
[www.nationaleatingdisorders.com](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.com)  
[www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org)  
[www.aedweb.org](http://www.aedweb.org)

### BHS is Here For You

***If you are concerned about eating behaviors or attitudes for yourself, a friend, or family member, take the first step and seek professional help. BHS, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), can offer information and guidance on dealing with eating disorders and treatment options. Please call our toll-free number 1-800-765-3277. We're here to help you!***