



Understanding Types of Eating Disorders

Eating disorders affect people of all genders, ages and backgrounds, and can manifest in various ways, going far beyond a simple refusal to eat. Recognizing the different types of these disorders and their symptoms can help in understanding and supporting those who may be struggling. Among the most common eating disorders are:

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia is the most well-known eating disorder, but it's much more than just "not eating." People with anorexia have an intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted body image, leading them to restrict their food intake. While weight loss is a hallmark symptom, anorexia can occur in individuals who are at or above average weight. Common signs of anorexia include:

- Extreme restriction of calories or specific food groups.
- Excessive exercise to burn calories.
- Intense preoccupation with food, dieting and body size.
- Avoidance of eating in front of others or being secretive about food consumption.
- Physical symptoms such as dizziness, fatigue and hair thinning.

Anorexia can lead to serious complications, including heart problems, bone loss, and in extreme cases, organ failure.

Bulimia Nervosa

Unlike anorexia, bulimia involves cycles of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors such as vomiting, excessive exercise or laxative use. People with bulimia may appear to be of average or above-average weight, which can make it harder to detect. Warning signs of bulimia include:

- Episodes of consuming large amounts of food in a short time, often seeming out of their control.
- Immediately going to the bathroom after meals to vomit.
- Sore throat and/or dental issues from frequent vomiting and dehydration.
- Shame or guilt about eating.
- Fluctuations in weight.

Bulimia can have serious health risks, such as electrolyte imbalances, gastrointestinal problems and heart complications.

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Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

Binge eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the United States. Unlike bulimia, individuals with BED do not purge after eating. Instead, they frequently consume large quantities of food, often in secret, and feel a lack of control during these episodes. This behavior can lead to feelings of shame and distress, as well as significant weight gain over time. Indicators of BED include:

- Eating unusually large amounts of food in a short period, even when not hungry.
- Eating until uncomfortably full or in secret.
- Frequent feelings of guilt, embarrassment or self-disgust after overeating.
- Weight gain or obesity.
- Emotional distress related to food and eating habits.

BED increases the risk of developing obesity-related health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)

ARFID is a lesser-known eating disorder. Distinct from anorexia, ARFID causes individuals to avoid food due to sensory issues, fear of choking or vomiting, or a lack of interest in eating. This leads to nutritional deficiencies and, in some cases, significant weight loss or failure to gain weight. Signs of ARFID include:

- Avoidance of certain textures, colors or types of food.
- Lack of appetite or interest in food.
- Reliance on nutritional supplements or feeding tubes for adequate nourishment.
- Weight loss or difficulty maintaining a healthy weight.

While ARFID is often associated with children, it can persist into adulthood and lead to serious health consequences if untreated.

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If you or someone you know is struggling with food and body image concerns, it's important to seek professional help. You can find additional resources through the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) or call the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders (ANAD) Helpline at 888-375-7767.

