

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders

An eating disorder is when you have abnormal eating habits that negatively affect your mental or physical health. They can be seen in women of any age. The most common eating disorders are the following:

- Binge eating - Where people eat a large amount of food in a very short period of time. People that binge eat are typically overweight.
- Anorexia Nervosa – Where people eat very little. People with anorexia have a very low body weight.
- Bulimia - Where people eat a lot and then self-induce vomiting. People with bulimia typically have a normal bodyweight.

People with anorexia or bulimia tend to be very critical on their weight and body shape and typically have a fear of being fat. They also tend to exercise excessively and use various methods to suppress their appetite.

Eating disorders can be very dangerous and are a real problem that should be addressed. Eating disorders typically goes hand in hand with anxiety disorders, depression and substance abuse. Woman with a very low body weight can also stop menstruating, loose their skin integrity and loose their bone density. Electrolyte imbalances and heart muscle weakening can also lead to heart attacks.

Cause:

The cause of the eating disorder vary from person to person. Examples are: abuse, the media, parents, social isolation, unstable home environment, negative peer pressure, poor body image, socioeconomic status, competitive weight-dependent sports woman

Symptoms:

Symptoms of eating disorders vary from disorder to disorder and person to person. Symptoms can include the following:

- Acne
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Tooth loss & cavities (bulimia)
- Stomach ulcers (bulimia)
- Weakness & fatigue
- Sensitivity to cold
- Infertility
- Kidney failure



- Stopped menstruating
- Social withdrawal
- Depression & Anxiety
- Osteoporosis (See page 102-103)

Eating disorders can be very dangerous to someone's health and even result in death. For this reason someone should see a doctor if they present with a combination of the symptoms. If you know a person with these symptoms, you have to try and convince them to see a doctor, because they will most likely not ask for help themselves.

People with an eating disorder typically do not ask for help because:

- They have a low self-esteem
- They have feelings of shame and guilt
- They think the problem will go away by itself
- They are scared, because the treatment usually involve weight gain
- They do not see the eating disorder as a problem

Treatment:

Firstly the patient should go and see a doctor. Friends and support systems plays an extremely important role. If you suspect someone close to you are struggling with an eating disorder, it is extremely important to find her some help. The most effective way in establishing recovery from an eating disorder is when the person realise that they have a problem and that they need help. This can be very difficult to admit.

Treatment typically consist of counselling, a proper diet, a normal amount of exercise, and the reduction of efforts to eliminate food. Some eating disorders can be very serious and even lead to hospitalization. Recovery can take up to 5 years.

Help can be found at:

- Any hospital or clinic.
- 'Cape Mental Health' – 021 447 9040 (8am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri)
- 'Mental Health Helpline' – 0800 12 13 14 (24 hour) or sms 31393 (counselor will call back)

Prevention

Promotion of a healthy lifestyle (See page 85) or early identification of an eating disorder. The concept of eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full should also be established in children at a young age.

