



Eating disorders often not just about the food

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In last week's article on eating disorders, we shared basic facts and information about the various types of eating disorders. If you are uncertain if a family member, friend, co-worker or neighbor may have an eating disorder, you should pay close attention to the following warning signs.

GENERAL SIGNS

- Makes excuses to skip meals and eats alone
- Preoccupation with food-related subjects in conversations
- Has difficulty admitting to problems and expressing feelings
- Makes self-critical statements about body and other aspects of self
- Worries excessively about other's opinions
- Begins to isolate
- Becomes increasingly perfectionistic of self and others

ANOREXIA NERVOSA

- Has significant weight loss
- Focuses on "good" foods and "bad" foods
- Drastically reduces fat in diet
- Makes statements related to perceptions of oneself as overweight (though thin)
- Verbally denies being hungry
- Skips meals and also may purge food
- Engages in food rituals such as cutting food into small pieces, leaving food on plate, eating very slowly
- Engages in excessive exercise

- Develops other rituals such as difficulty changing pen colors when note-taking; rigid schedule
- Wears multiple layers of clothing

BULEMIA NERVOSA

- Goes to restroom after meals
- Eats large quantities of food without gaining weight
- Eats rapidly
- Has unexplained disappearance of food
- Has mood swings
- Laxative or diuretic wrappers appear in trash
- Displays swelling around the jaw, blood shot eyes; dental problems

BINGE EATING DISORDER

- Has weight gain (though not always)
- Frequently eats large amounts of food rapidly
- Eats to the point of being overly full
- May eat only in isolation

The following also are great tips to know in helping prevent eating disorders that the National Eating Disorder Association publishes on its website:

- Learn all you can about anorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorders. Awareness will help you avoid judgmental or mistaken attitudes about food, weight, body shape and eating disorders.
- Discourage the idea that a particular weight or body size will lead to happiness and fulfillment.

- Avoid categorizing foods as "good/safe/no-fat" versus "bad/dangerous/fattening."
- Make a decision not to judge others and yourself on the basis of weight or body shape.
- Become a critical viewer of the media and its messages about self-esteem and body image and help children challenge the ways in which television, magazines and other media imply that a slender body means power, popularity, happiness or perfection.
- As a parent, be a good role model in regard to sensible eating, exercise and self-acceptance.
- Encourage your child to be active and to enjoy what their bodies can do and feel like.
- Promote self-esteem and self-respect in children on the basis of intellectual, athletic and social endeavors.
- Be a model of healthy self-esteem and body image. Choose to talk about yourself with respect and appreciation. Choose to value yourself based on your goals, accomplishments, talents and character.
- Embrace the natural diversity of human bodies and celebrate your body's unique shape and size.

If you suspect someone has an eating disorder, communicate your concerns in a calm manner sharing observations of their behaviors that have led to your concerns.

Telling someone with an eating disorder to "eat" or "stop eating" or



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"go exercise" is not helpful. Gently but firmly encourage the person to seek help from a trained professional. If treatment is warranted, a multidisciplinary team approach, including a physician, nutritionist, therapist, and possibly a psychiatrist and fitness trainer, is recommended.

For more information on symptoms, physical complications and treatment, as well as additional information on what to do if you suspect someone has an eating disorder, visit the following websites:

- www.AEDweb.org — The Academy for Eating Disorders
- www.edap.org — Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention
- www.somethingfishy.org — General Information and Personal Experiences
- www.edreferral.com — Eating Disorders Referral Site
- www.NationalEatingDisorders.org

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