

## **TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT**

Nowadays, eating disorders are among the syndromes that affect mostly young girls (increasingly boys). Eating disorders have a cultural and social dimension as well as an individual one. Lately, thin bodies are becoming more and more attractive for young people. In the media, the image of a "successful person" is depicted as the "thin person". Fashion industry had also contributed to equating beauty with thinness.

The pressure to conform the society, what's appreciated and the fear of losing control lead some people to have more worries about their bodies. In addition, dieting industry is receiving a great deal of support from media and tries to make everyone believe that they have to be thinner.

Furthermore, factors such as low self-esteem, familial and relational problems, intense anxiety and stress also contribute to the development of an eating disorder. Mostly, eating disorders come about as an indicator of an emotional or psychological disturbance. When one starts to experience an eating disorder, food, weight, size becomes the focus of his/her life. The person constantly thinks about eating and does self-destructive things about it.

Eating disorders have several, usually overlapping types:

### **Obsessive Eating:**

People who complain from this disorder usually talk about an "unstoppable desire to eat". This desire is not caused by hunger. It is intolerable even if the person is not hungry. They eat extremely and very fast. They prefer to do this alone.

Regret and shame follows excessive eating attacks. Harsh, unhealthy diets are attempted after overeating. However, it continues as a vicious cycle between overeating and harsh dieting.

People with obsessive eating problem look or feel overweight. They think that they have no control over eating.

### **Bulimia Nervosa:**

Bulimics also have excessive eating attacks. Excessive eating usually comes as an irresistible desire to eat, following an emotional pain. Food, body size and weight constantly keep their minds busy. They are extremely afraid of gaining weight.

Accordingly, they may throw up or dispose of the food from their intestines by using some drugs. Usually, bulimics hide this removal phase from around. They feel intense guilt and shame.

Bulimics may be normal weight or even overweight. They think that they have no control over eating. They try to regain this control by throwing the food out, but all this effort costs them to feel more out-of-control.

Throwing up or the use of laxatives may seriously harm the body:

- Destruction of stomach and gullet
- Destruction of kidneys
- Loss of body liquids
- Cramps
- Weakened muscles
- Passing out
- Swollen glands
- Heart arrhythmia or sudden cardiac death

### **Anorexia Nervosa:**

In Anorexia Nervosa cases, the individual starves him/herself to an extent that risks his/her health. Their body perception is vastly distorted; even when the others regard them as very thin, they believe that they are fat and they do not eat.

Usually in addition to not eating, they extremely exercise. The longer the anorexia nervosa lasts, the harder it becomes to get rid of it.

The self-esteem of the person is very low, s/he feels lonely and guilty. S/he feels shame. S/he may have emotional pains.

It is common among women of age between 13 and 25. (The number of males with anorexia nervosa is gradually increasing) There may be decrease or discontinuation of menstrual periods.

In some cases, the person can be hospitalized. Unfortunately, if not treated, this disorder may result in death.

Anorexics look extremely thin. Since they are afraid of losing their control if they eat something, they try to eat as less as possible (even try not to eat).

Anorexia may seriously damage the body:

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Decrease in mental activity
- Becoming extremely hairy
- Circulatory diseases
- Feeling extremely cold
- Vertigo
- Osteoporosis
- Interruption of development
- Impairments in digestive organs

### **If you are experiencing an eating disorder...**

If you are experiencing the conditions described above, following suggestions may help:

1. First, accept that you have a problem about eating.
2. Obtain information about eating disorders. Read books, search the internet, and talk to your school counselor or another mental health professional.
3. Think about what the eating disorder is masking, protecting you from. Go over the things that you will have to face in the absence of the eating disorder. Think about what you really want/need instead of eating.
4. Pay attention to your feelings. Recognize your feelings when eating is the issue. Share your feelings with people you trust. Keep a diary.
5. Obtain information about healthy nutrition and try to develop a healthy eating pattern. It is important to have a balanced diet, but it is normal to overdo sometimes.
6. Accept yourself as you are and try to love yourself as you are. Happiness is not dependent on your thinness. Remember, who you are is more important than how you look.
7. Do not harshly criticize and judge yourself. Negative criticisms will make you feel worse and this may affect your attitude about eating.
8. Look for the ways to increase your self-esteem, to improve. Talk to the school counselors. Attend group sessions.
9. Treat yourself well. After you set your priorities, spend time for activities that will make you feel relaxed and cheerful.
10. Do not keep your eating disorder as a secret. Contact your school counselor or another mental health professional as soon as possible.

### **If a friend of yours has an eating disorder:**

1. Don't forget that your friend is first an individual and then a person who is having trouble with eating. Do not let the eating issue to overshadow your friendship. Keep doing things that you used to do together.
  2. If your friend did not share his/her problem with you yet, tell him/her the things that make you suspect and mention that you have worries about him/her. It is highly probable that s/he will deny, do not insist.
  3. Do not nag. Do not let eating to become your only subject. If s/he is denying, do not play the detective and secretly follow him/her.
  4. Be ready to listen to your friend when s/he needs to talk, support him/her. However, protect your own limits, do not take on more burden than you can deal with. You may harm both yourself and our friendship. Offer him/her to get help from a professional if you feel that you can't deal with. But remember that you can just offer; the problem is his/her problem and s/he will put up with the consequences if s/he doesn't do something about it.
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**For More Information**

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