



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Eating Disorders**

Eating disorders are dangerous psychological problems that currently affect over five million people. Recent studies show that 90 percent of those suffering from eating disorders are teenage and college-age women. The National Institute of Mental Health notes that eating disorders have one of the highest mortality rates of all mental disorders, killing up to 10 percent of their victims. Eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating are all characterized by disturbed eating behaviors and are usually accompanied by psychological, emotional and physical problems. People with eating disorders are known to suffer from depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. The American College of Health Association states

that people with eating disorders generally are perfectionists who feel inadequate, ashamed, and guilty when they don't measure up to their own standards - standards that are often unrealistic and based on rigid, black/white, either/or thinking. There is no exact cause for an eating disorder. Mental health professionals believe that a combination of biological, psychological, social and family factors all contribute to an eating disorder.

The American Psychological Association offers the following descriptions of the three major types of eating disorders:

Physical Problems Associated With Eating Disorders

- *Chronic kidney problems*
- *Irregular heart problems*
- *Cessation of menstruation*
- *Irritation and tears in the esophagus*
- *Parotid gland swelling (under jawline)*
- *Erosion of tooth enamel and increased cavities*
- *Electrolyte imbalance*
- *Low Potassium*
- *Light headedness and dizziness or fainting*
- *Sensitive to the cold*
- *Dry skin and thinning scalp hair*
- *Stomach and intestinal problems*
- *Growth of lanugo (fine hair on body surface)*

- **ANOREXIA NERVOSA** causes a person to have a distorted body image in which they see themselves as overweight even when they're really thin. Often refusing to eat, exercising compulsively, and developing unusual habits such as refusing to eat in front of others, they lose large amounts of weight and may even starve to death.

- Individuals with **BULIMIA NERVOSA** eat excessive quantities of food, then purge their bodies of the food and calories they fear by using laxatives, enemas, or diuretic, vomiting and/or exercising. Often acting in secrecy, they feel disgusted and ashamed as they binge, yet relieved of tension and negative emotions once their stomachs are empty again.

- Like people with bulimia, those with **BINGE EATING DISORDER** experience frequent episodes of out-of-control eating. The difference is that binge eaters don't purge their bodies of excess calories.



How are Eating Disorders Treated?

Treatment for an eating disorder usually begins with a thorough physical examination to rule out any other illness. When an eating disorder is diagnosed, medical and mental health professionals must determine a comprehensive treatment plan. This may involve a variety of medical professionals, such as a nutritionist, an individual psychotherapist, a group and family therapist and a pharmacologist.

The most effective treatments for an eating disorder usually involve several forms of therapeutic approaches, such as family therapy, individual therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy and the participation in one or more self-help groups. It is important to realize that eating disorders are best treated when diagnosed at an early stage. The National Institute of Mental Health states that the longer abnormal eating behaviors persist, the more difficult it is to overcome the disorder and its effects on the body.



How To Help Someone With An Eating Disorder

If you have reason to believe that a friend or a family member is suffering with an eating disorder, your first step should be to confront the person and express your concern. A person with an eating disorder is not easily convinced that they have a problem. In most cases, it takes several interventions with family members, friends and health professionals before a person with an eating disorder will begin to understand the severity of their condition. It is a good idea to arm yourself with specifics and examples of their behavior that you have observed. The National Eating Disorder Organization believes that you can help someone with an eating disorder in the following ways:

- Collect information. Find treatment resources, such as your local Mental Health Association or school system. Get help from support personnel.
- In a caring and nonjudgmental way, tell the person what you have observed (anorexia or bulimic behavior) and suggest they seek appropriate physical and psychological assessment.
- If the person is a minor, discuss your observations with their parents (check your community's laws and regulations).
- If the individual and/or the parents deny there is a problem, consult with supervisors, treatment resources, children's services, or National Eating Disorders Organization (NEDO) for what to do next.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

Website www.portagepath.org

Appointments 330-253-3100
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline 330-434-9144
888-434-8878



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