

## Risk Factors

Eating disorders can affect people of all ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, body weights, and genders. Eating disorders frequently appear during the teen years or young adulthood, but may also develop during childhood or later in life. These disorders affect both genders.

Researchers are finding that eating disorders are caused by a complex interaction of genetic, biological, behavioral, psychological, and social factors. Eating disorders tend to run in families. Researchers are working to identify DNA variations that are linked to the increased risk of developing eating disorders.

## Treatments

It is important to seek treatment early for eating disorders. People with eating disorders are at higher risk for medical complications and suicide, but complete recovery is possible. People with eating disorders can also have other mental disorders (e.g. depression or anxiety) or substance abuse. Treatment plans are tailored to individual needs and may include: individual, group, and/or family psychotherapy, medical monitoring, nutritional counseling and/or medications.

**For more information on Eating Disorders** and other mental illnesses, please contact any of the following:

NAMI Flagstaff at [www.namiflagstaff.org](http://www.namiflagstaff.org)

National Institute on Mental Health at [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**Or scan image to go directly to  
NAMI Flagstaff website**



## EATING DISORDERS

There is a commonly held misconception that eating disorders are a lifestyle choice. Eating disorders are actually serious and often fatal illnesses that are associated with severe disturbances in people's eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. Preoccupation with food, body weight, and shape may also signal an eating disorder. Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

### Anorexia Nervosa

People with anorexia nervosa may see themselves as overweight, even when they are dangerously underweight. Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any mental disorder. While many people with this disorder die from complications associated with starvation, others die of suicide.

#### Symptoms include:

- Extremely restricted eating
- Extreme thinness (emaciation)
- A relentless pursuit of thinness and unwillingness to maintain a normal or healthy weight
- Intense fear of gaining weight
  
- Distorted body image, a self-esteem that is heavily influenced by perceptions of body weight and shape, or a denial of the seriousness of low body weight

**Other symptoms may develop over time, including:**

- Thinning of the bones (osteopenia or osteoporosis)
- Mild anemia and muscle wasting and weakness
- Brittle hair and nails
- Dry and yellowish skin
- Growth of fine hair all over the body (lanugo)
- Severe constipation
- Low blood pressure slowed breathing and pulse
- Damage to the structure and function of the heart
- Brain damage
- Multi-organ failure
- Drop in internal body temperature, causing a person to feel cold all the time
- Lethargy, sluggishness, or feeling tired all the time
- Infertility

**Bulimia Nervosa**

People with bulimia nervosa have recurrent and frequent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food and feeling a lack of control over these episodes. This binge-eating is followed by behavior that compensates for the overeating such as forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviors. People with bulimia nervosa may be slightly underweight, normal weight, or over overweight.

**Symptoms of Bulimia Nervosa include:**

- Chronically inflamed and sore throat
- Swollen salivary glands in the neck and jaw area
- Worn tooth enamel and increasingly sensitive and decaying teeth as a result of exposure to stomach acid
- Acid reflux disorder and other gastrointestinal problems
- Intestinal distress and irritation from laxative abuse
- Severe dehydration from purging of fluids
- Electrolyte imbalance which can lead to stroke or heart attack

**Binge-eating Disorder**

People with binge-eating disorder lose control over his or her eating. Unlike bulimia nervosa, periods of binge-eating are not followed by purging, excessive exercise, or fasting. As a result, people with binge-eating disorder often are overweight or obese. Binge-eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the U.S.

**Symptoms of binge-eating disorder include:**

- Eating unusually large amounts of food in a specific amount of time, such as a 2-hour period
  - Eating even when you're full or not hungry
  - Eating fast during binge episodes
  - Eating until you're uncomfortably full
  - Eating alone or in secret to avoid embarrassment
  - Feeling distressed, ashamed, or guilty about your eating.
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- Frequently dieting, possibly without weight loss