



Eating Disorders And Depression

One third to one half of people with eating disorders report struggling with depression and anxiety.

Sometimes depression can lead to eating disorders – and for some, eating disorders can trigger depression. There are three major eating disorders: *anorexia nervosa*, *bulimia nervosa*, and *binge eating disorder*. While the symptoms of each are different, people experiencing these illnesses generally are also suffering from stress, social pressure, and other mental health problems. Each is treatable, but can cause serious physical and emotional problems, if left untreated.

The Basics:

- Anorexia Nervosa – Anorexia’s core symptom is an intense, unreasonable fear of becoming fat, which doesn’t ease even with severe weight loss and extreme reduction of food intake. Untreated anorexia has severe physical consequences – disrupted menstrual periods, malnutrition, and even death.
- Bulimia Nervosa – The key characteristic of bulimia is ongoing bingeing (eating large quantities of food) and purging (vomiting, excessive exercise or use of laxatives). Stress, intense fear of gaining weight and depression are some triggers for bulimia. People with the disorder eat to ease these stresses, and then seek to relieve the guilt they feel for overeating by purging. All the purging methods cause physical problems in time, including electrolyte imbalances, which impair nerve function, dehydration, and stomach and muscle cramps.
- Binge Eating Disorder – Binge eating is compulsive overeating throughout the day. People with this disorder often eat quickly, feel out of control while eating, hoard and hide food from others. They are often depressed, with feelings of self-disgust, guilt and isolation. Binge eating, like anorexia and bulimia, is harmful to one’s health. Problems triggered by binge eating can include high blood pressure, heart problems, joint pain and fatigue.

Body image disturbance underlies the development of all eating disorders. Women, in particular, are socialized to believe their worth and power comes from rigid cultural definitions of beauty, including thinness. The result of this may be the development of depression, self-loathing and eating disorders.

Getting Help

Begin by visiting your university counseling service or the student health service. Your doctor, a mental health professional or these other sources may also help.

- National Mental Health Association: www.nmha.org, 1-800-969-6642
- National Eating Disorders Association: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
- The Eating Disorders Site: www.closetoyou.org/eatingdisorders
- The Something Fishy Website on Eating Disorders: www.somethingfishy.org
- AnorexicWeb: www.anorexicweb.com
- Anorexia Nervosa and Related Disorders: www.anred.com
- American Dietetic Association: www.eatright.org
- Overeaters Anonymous: www.oa.org

This Finding Hope and Help fact sheet is a publication of NMHA's **Campaign for America's Mental Health**. The Campaign promotes mental health and raises awareness that mental illnesses are real, common and treatable through national and community outreach.

The Campaign is made possible through educational grants from AstraZeneca, Bristol-Meyers Squibb Company, The E.H.A. Foundation, Eli Lilly and Company, Forest Laboratories, Inc., GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer Inc, and Wyeth.