

Providing the Irish community with information, resources, and opportunities to talk about mental health.

EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders are serious illnesses characterized by very negative thoughts and behaviors around food, body weight, and image. Eating disorders can cause major, potentially fatal medical conditions.

There are three common types of eating disorder.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia Nervosa involves the severe restriction of food intake and a refusal to maintain a healthy weight. Symptoms may include;

- Extreme thinness (emaciation)
- Engaging in excessive physical exercise
- Extreme restriction of eating
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Thinking obsessively about food, weight loss, and body image
- Distorted body image
- Self-esteem that depends directly on body shape
- Physical symptoms may include : thinning of bones, anemia and muscle loss, damage to the heart, growth of fine hair all over the body

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia Nervosa involves recurrent episodes of compulsively binge-eating large quantities of food followed by behaviors meant to compensate for this intake of food, such as forced vomiting, taking laxatives, fasting, or excessive exercise. Symptoms of bulimia may include;

- Chronically inflamed/sore throat
- Worn tooth enamel
- Dehydration
- Intestinal issues

People with bulimia may maintain a normal weight or be overweight.

Binge Eating Disorder

Binge eating disorder involves uncontrollably eating large quantities of food in a short amount of time. Unlike bulimia, these episodes of binge eating are not followed by vomiting, exercise, or fasting. As a result, those with binge eating disorder can be overweight or obese. Symptoms of binge eating disorder include;

- Eating large amounts of food in a short period of time
- Eating even when not hungry
- Eating until or past a point of being uncomfortably full
- Eating in secret to avoid embarrassment.
- Feeling distress or ashamed about eating

Causes and Treatment

No single cause has been identified for eating disorders. Many experts believe that eating disorders are a coping mechanism for dealing with painful feelings and emotions. It is thought that genetics, environment, emotional difficulties and peer pressure can also contribute to the development of an eating disorder.

Treatments will vary depending on the kind of eating disorder in question, but common interventions include

- Psychotherapy e.g. talk therapy, behavioral therapy.
- Medicine e.g. antidepressants, anti-anxiety
- Nutritional counseling and weight monitoring

One in twenty

people will have an eating disorder at some point in their lives

One in ten

people diagnosed with an eating disorder is male

Anorexia

has the highest mortality rate of any mental disorder.

This fact sheet was produced using material from

NAMI Chicago
<http://namichicago.org/en/fact-sheets/>

National Institute on Mental Illness (NIMI)
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>