

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are conditions that affect both a person's emotional and physical health. Eating disorders are serious and can be life-threatening. They are associated with a wide range of harmful psychological, physical, and social consequences. A person with an eating disorder may start out just eating smaller or larger amounts of food. At some point, their urge to eat less or more will spiral out of control. Other signs of an eating disorder can be severe distress or concern about body weight or shape, or extreme efforts to manage weight or food intake.

Who is affected by eating disorders?

In the United States, 30 million people will be impacted by an eating disorder at some point in their lifetime. These conditions affect all kinds of people, regardless of race, age, sex, or size. Rates among women and girls are 2½ times greater than among men and boys. Eating disorders frequently appear during the teen years or young adulthood, but also may develop during childhood or later in life.

What are the health effects and consequences of eating disorders?

Eating disorders are not just a fad or a phase. They are real, complex, and devastating conditions that can have serious consequences for health, productivity, and relationships. Every eating disorder has unique health effects and consequences. Below are the most common eating disorders.

- **Anorexia nervosa.** During the cycle of self-starvation, the body is denied the essential nutrients it needs to function normally. This starvation forces the body to slow down all of its processes to conserve energy.
- **Bulimia.** The recurrent binge-and-purge cycles of bulimia can affect the entire digestive system. Binging and purging can lead to electrolyte and chemical imbalances in the body that affect the heart and other major organ functions.
- **Binge-eating disorder.** Binge eating often results in many of the same health risks associated with clinical obesity, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

Mobile apps

- [MyM3 Assessment](#)
- [MindShift](#)
- [Recovery Record](#)
- [Rise Up + Recover](#)

Tips from our docs

This month, our healthy tip is brought to you by **Duane Ross, MD**, our Medical Director.

People with eating disorders need to seek professional help. Typical treatment goals include restoring adequate nutrition, bringing weight to a healthy level, reducing excessive exercise, and stopping bingeing and purging behaviors. Evidence also suggests that antidepressant medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration may help bulimia nervosa. Antidepressant medications also may be effective for treating co-occurring anxiety or depression for other eating disorders.

Treatment plans often are tailored to individual needs and may include one or more of the following:

- Individual, group, or family psychotherapy
- Medical care and monitoring
- Nutritional counseling
- Medications

Some patients also may need to be hospitalized to treat problems caused by malnutrition or to ensure they eat enough if they are very underweight. Complete recovery is possible. If you or someone you care about might be suffering from an eating disorder, it is important to educate yourself and seek professional guidance as soon as possible. Early intervention is key to successful recovery.

Additional resources

- [National Eating Disorders Association](#)
- [Eating Disorders: About More Than Food](#)