

Anorexia Nervosa



Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ADHD

Introduction

Anorexia nervosa is a type of eating disorders. People who have anorexia have an intense fear of gaining weight. They severely limit the amount of food they eat and can become dangerously thin.

Overview and Facts

According to the American Psychiatric Association, as many as 1 in every 100 females has anorexia nervosa. Persons with anorexia fear gaining weight and are at least 15% below their ideal body weights. They also believe that the main measure of self-worth is their body image. *Anorexia is most common in:*

- Teens. Like other eating disorders, anorexia usually starts in the teen years with strict dieting and rapid weight loss. But it can start even earlier or in adulthood.
- Women. About 9 out of 10 people with anorexia are female. But some boys and men have it too.

Many people who have anorexia are white and come from wealthy families. But it can happen to anyone.

Symptoms

People who have anorexia often strongly deny that they have a problem. They do not see or believe that they do. It is usually up to their loved ones to get help for them. If you are worried about someone, you can look for certain signs.

People who have anorexia:

- Weigh much less than is healthy or normal.
- Are very afraid of gaining weight.
- Refuse to stay at a normal weight.
- Think they are overweight even when they are very thin.

Their lives become focused on controlling their weight. They may:

- Obsess about food, weight, and dieting.
- Strictly limit their food intake. For example, they may limit themselves to just a few hundred calories a day or refuse to eat certain foods, such as anything with fat or sugar.
- Exercise a lot, even when they are sick.
- Vomit or use laxatives or water pills (diuretics) to avoid weight gain.
- Develop odd habits about food, like cutting all their food into tiny pieces or chewing every bite a certain number of times.
- Become secretive. They may pull away from family and friends, make excuses not to eat around other people, and lie about their eating habits.

As starvation sets in, they start to develop signs of serious problems throughout the body.

For instance, they may:

- Feel weak, tired, or faint.
- Have thinning hair, dry skin, and brittle nails.
- Stop having menstrual periods.
- Feel cold all the time.

- Have low blood pressure and a slow heartbeat.
- Have purplish skin color on their arms and legs from poor blood flow.
- Have swollen feet and hands.
- Grow a layer of baby-fine hair all over their body.

Consult a doctor if:

- You feel like you have symptoms of an eating disorder.
- You suspect a family member or friend has an eating disorder, talk with them about the problem.

The sooner you get medical and psychological treatment, the faster you will be on your way to recovery.

Causes and Risk Factors

Eating disorders are complex, and experts don't really know what causes them. But they may be due to a mix of family history, social factors, and personality traits. You may be more likely to have anorexia if:

- Other people in your family are obese, have an eating disorder, or have a mood disorder such as depression or anxiety.
- You have a job or do a sport that stresses body size, such as ballet, modeling, or gymnastics.
- You are the type of person who tries to be perfect all the time, never feels good enough, or worries a lot.
- You are dealing with stressful life events, such as divorce, moving to a new town or school, or losing a loved one.

Tests and Diagnosis

To diagnose an eating disorder, a person should consult a mental health professional who will rely on scientific criteria to check whether he/she has an eating disorder.

If your doctor thinks that you may have an eating disorder, he or she will compare your weight with the expected weight for someone of your height and age. He or she will also check your heart, lungs, blood pressure, skin, and hair to look for problems caused by not eating enough. You may also have blood tests or X-rays.

Your doctor may ask questions about how you feel. It is common for a treatable mental health problem such as depression or anxiety to play a part in an eating disorder.

Treatment

The main treatments for eating disorders are a combination of:

- Psychotherapy/ Cognitive behavioral therapy which helps by identifying and replacing inaccurate thoughts to help change behavior and emotional state.
- Medication such as antidepressants in case the person is depressed or anxious.
- Nutritional feeding and medical monitoring.

If left untreated, eating disorders can lead to serious illness and even death.

Sources and Links

www.idraac.org
www.webmd.com