



comprehensive treatment for mental health

Eating Disorders

Eating Disorders: What are they?

There are many varieties of eating disorders. The most common are as follows:

Anorexia Nervosa: is characterized by a refusal to eat which leads to extreme weight loss, often to the point of emaciation. Individuals with Anorexia develop distorted body images that can lead them to become seriously, even dangerously, underweight.

Bulimia Nervosa: is characterized primarily by a cycle of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors, such as self-induced vomiting, in an attempt to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating. Like anorexics, bulimics are obsessed with food and weight. However, as opposed to not eating, bulimics often binge eat and then purge themselves to avoid gaining weight. During the binge, bulimics eat large amounts of food, very rapidly, and with little self-control. Purging may involve inducing vomiting, using laxatives, or excessive exercise.

Binge Eating Disorder (BED): is characterized by recurrent binge eating without the regular use of compensatory measures to counter the binge eating while feeling out of control, ashamed or disgusted over the behavior

Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS): can include some combination of the signs and symptoms of the above disorders, but not all of the criteria necessary to meet a specific diagnosis. Like all eating disorders, EDNOS are physically dangerous and emotionally destructive.

Who develops an Eating Disorder, and why?

It is often difficult for others to understand what would provoke someone to starve themselves or purposefully vomit after eating. Theories developed to explain the emergence of eating disorders usually regard these illnesses as the result of a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Biological: It appears that genetics may predispose a person to an eating disorder. Once an eating disorder develops, there are also several biological changes that might result in the intensification of the illness.

Psychological: A variety of psychological factors are likely to influence the development of an eating disorder. These may include: perfectionism, self-esteem, rigid thinking, control issues, identity, sexuality, and other psychiatric disorders.

Social: A variety of social factors play a role in the development of eating disorders. The excessive value that is placed on thinness in our society can cause it to be equated with achievement, intelligence, popularity, and success. It is also suggested that an individual's family life may affect a child's risk of developing an eating disorder.

The Need for Treatment

If left untreated, serious medical, social, and behavioral complications can result. Fortunately, proper care can make the difference. Treatment for eating disorders generally has three goals:

1. Correction of medical problems associated with starving or binge eating/purging
2. Resolution of the underlying psychological and social dynamics
3. Establishment of normal weight and healthy eating behaviors

It is often difficult to convince people with eating disorders to get help. If you believe someone you know is struggling, there are ways you can approach them:

1. Be honest, state the behaviors you have noticed and what you suspect.
2. Know where help is available.
3. Remember you cannot solve the problem, the individual needs professional help.

If you would like more information, or if you would like to make an appointment, Pathway Clinic can help at 608-643-3663.