Bulimia

Bulimia is an eating disorder. Patients who have this disorder go on eating binges and then try to purge their system with:

- Forced voluntary vomiting.
- Laxatives.
- Excessive exercise.

After periods of normal eating the binges will begin again with repetition of the same behavior. Patients with this disorder usually know something is wrong and their behavior is embarrassing to them. They try to hide it from family and friends.

Two differences between patients with bulimia and those with anorexia are:

- Patients with bulimia know something is wrong, patients with anorexia do not.
- Patients with bulimia are usually of normal weigh, patients with anorexia are not.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BULIMIA INCLUDE:

- **Binge eating** of large amounts of food. It is not the same as having small snacks continually during the day. Binge eating is usually done alone. Patients feel shame for their behavior. They recognize it as abnormal. During the episodes of binging, the people with this disorder feel as though they are **not in control.**
- The binging is followed by **regular purging** with self induced vomiting. There is often:
  - Excessive use of laxatives.
  - *Diuretics* (water loss pills).
  - Starvation between bouts of binging.
  - Excessive exercise to lose weight.
- This behavior is sometimes accompanied by: alcohol and drug use, and/or out of control gambling, spending and sexual behavior, all of which **lead to more guilt and disgust**. This in turn causes another episode of binging as this illness's means of coping.

BULIMIA LEADS TO A NUMBER OF MEDICAL PROBLEMS related directly to the binging and purging. Some of these are:

- **Esophageal** (the tube leading from the mouth to the stomach) **tears** can be caused by the forceful vomiting. This can lead to bleeding from the esophagus and stomach.
- There may be **electrolyte disorders** (imbalances of the ions or salts in the blood).
- There may be *chronic* (long standing) **kidney and colon problems**.
- The suggestion of bulimia is present on physical exam by the **loss of enamel on the teeth**. This loss comes from frequent forced vomiting. The acid from the stomach destroys the enamel on the teeth.

If you or a loved one is suspected of having bulimia, it is necessary to obtain medical help. This is a psychiatric disorder and counseling can help with an illness that can be devastating. Your caregiver can guide you to proper information and treatment sources for this. **Do not feel alone.** Many people suffer with this disorder and there are caregivers to help you conquer this. **You will feel better.**

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