Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are medical problems which usually have psychological or emotional causes. Depression, obsession with food and distortion of body image are common in people with eating disorders. Over time, eating disorders may damage your body.

The most common eating disorders are:

- Bulimia - Bulimia is binge overeating followed by purging. Purging may include self-induced vomiting, excessive exercising or abuse of laxatives. Bulimia may start as a way to control weight. Later, the binge and purge cycle may be caused by stress or an emotional crisis. This is primarily a disease in young women.
- Anorexia Nervosa - Anorexia is an extremely low body weight due to severe dieting or compulsive exercising or both. Typically anorexics are perfectionists or high achievers. They frequently do not want treatment. This is primarily a disease in young women.
- Compulsive Overeating - This eating disorder involves bouts of excessive food binging despite feeling full and satisfied. Compulsive overeating often leads to obesity.

Anorexia and bulimia can lead to serious medical problems including:

- Extreme malnutrition.
- Hormone imbalance.
- Vitamin and mineral deficiencies.
- Organ damage.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver will do a complete physical examination. A psychological evaluation may be needed. The psychological evaluation will include questions about eating habits and self-image. Blood and urine tests may be done.

TREATMENT

Treatment includes counseling, proper nutrition, proper exercise and sometimes medication. Hospital care may be necessary in extreme cases.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Learn about your eating disorder.
- Identify situations that cause the urge to overeat or diet.
- Develop a plan when you have urges to overeat or diet.
- Learn who can support you when you need to talk.
- Resist weighing yourself or checking yourself in the mirror frequently.
- Follow your caregiver's meal and exercise plan.
- It is very important to keep all follow-up referrals and appointments.
- Get regular dental care every 6 months.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have a rapid weight loss or gain.
- You cause yourself to vomit after eating.
- You abuse stimulants or diet aids.
- You have compulsive exercise habits.
- You have an irregular pulse.
- You have a constant fear of gaining weight.
- You purge yourself with laxatives after eating.
- You have compulsive eating or dieting habits.
- You have irregular or loss of menstrual periods.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have blood or brown flecks (like coffee grounds) in your vomit.
- You have bright red or black tarry stools.
- You have chest pain or pressure.

- You have difficulty breathing.
- You do not urinate every 8 hours.

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