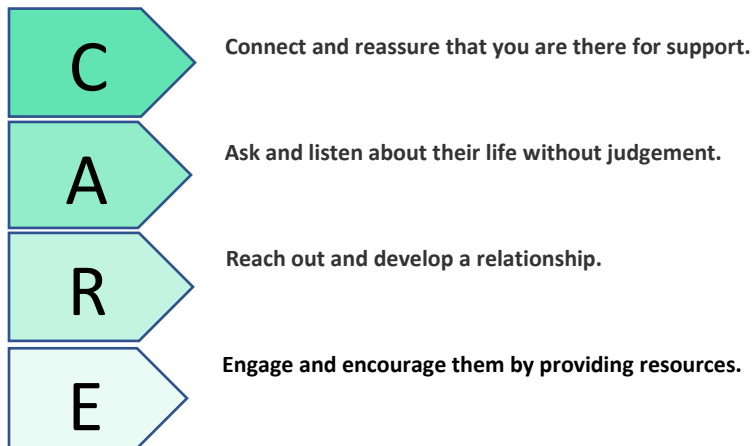


*For our students with an eating disorder:*



## What are eating disorders?

**Eating disorders occur when someone ties their self-worth chiefly in terms of their body shape or weight and controlling them. Eating disorders affect many people and can be potentially life threatening. They are generally more common in girls than boys. People with eating disorders may also have a co-occurring disorder (e.g. substance use, anxiety, or depression).**

## What are the signs?

Severe weight loss leads to other physical and emotional complications. People who are anorexic or bulimic may experience several or all the following symptoms:

- noticeable weight loss (with distorted body image), particularly in the case of anorexia
- inconspicuous binge eating (feeling shame or guilt) followed by purging, in the case of bulimia throat irritation due to repeated vomiting
- dieting behaviors (counting calories, fasting)
- excessive or ritualistic exercise (even in bad weather)
- rigid patterns around food preparation and eating (cutting tiny pieces and eating slowly, calorie counting)
- avoiding meals (particularly when in a social setting)
- lying about amounts of food or types of food eaten
- growth of fine body hair
- excessive constipation
- swollen glands
- severe dehydration
- depression and mood swings
- menstrual irregularities
- tooth loss/decay
- risk of heart irregularities
- hyperactivity

Living life with anorexia or bulimia can be a devastating experience, and without treatment, anorexia can be life-threatening. Also, after years of secret bingeing and purging, people with bulimia can develop serious gastro-intestinal disorders and other physical ailments than can threaten life. The denial of problems and thinking or feeling that 'nothing is wrong' are often part of the illness. Eating disorders can be overcome.

# What is anorexia nervosa?

Anorexia Nervosa is characterized by a drastic weight loss from dieting, which can be accompanied by over-exercising and the abuse of laxatives. The individual's body image is distorted and an intense fear of becoming obese takes over. This can lead to emaciation, failing physical and psychological health and sometimes death. Most people with anorexia experience distorted thinking and do not recognize how underweight they are, which makes it difficult to convince them to seek treatment.

# What is bulimia nervosa?

Bulimia nervosa is the most common clinical eating disorder. It is characterized by secretive episodes of binge eating followed by behaviors that compensate for the binge. These may include: self-induced vomiting (purging), the use of laxatives or diuretics, or excessive exercise and fasting. Unlike anorexia, bulimia can be difficult to diagnose because it is secretive and people may maintain a steady weight level due to the counterbalancing cycle of bingeing and purging.

- Approximately 90% of those with eating disorders are women.
- In the US Up to 30 million people suffer from an eating disorder.
- An estimated 1.1 to 4.2 percent of women have bulimia nervosa in their lifetime.
- Eating disorders usually develop in people between ages 14-25.
- Eating disorders often, although not always, occur in combination with a history of childhood sexual abuse.
- Eating disorders often co-occur with depression, anxiety, or substance use disorders.

# Risk factors for anorexia or bulimia

The exact reasons as to why an individual develops an eating disorder is unknown, although certain pressures may lead an individual to anorexia or bulimia. For example:

- Biological factors such as obesity, early start of menstrual period, family members with an eating disorder, or family members with mental illnesses.
- Psychological factors such as low self-esteem, dieting, anxiety or perfectionism.
- Social factors such as conflict at home, history of dieting, parental obesity, abuse, neglect, critical comments from others, environmental stress (e.g. poverty, racism).
- Society's emphasis on thinness and fitness contributes to young peoples' self-destructive image of themselves.
- During puberty, there is a new emphasis on the body. Since so much value is placed upon image, anything less than society's version of the extremely thin ideal can contribute to low self-esteem or depression, which can lead to an eating disorder.
- Eating disorders may also develop when an individual is trying to gain control in their life. If someone is experiencing stress, anger or anxiety problems towards family or relationships, the control over intake of food can be viewed as the ultimate way to control their life.

# What are the treatments?

Research has indicated that the earlier the appropriate intervention occurs, the more likely the eating disorder will be successfully overcome. The best approach is psychotherapy, which can include counseling for the family, along with group therapy with other people who have eating disorders. Cognitive behavior therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, family therapy, physical interventions and medication can also be helpful. Medical treatments are used in severe cases. Finding a knowledgeable professional with whom you feel comfortable and can trust in discussing your situation is very important to one's success.

# Where can I go for help?

There are many people such as health professionals who can help a person with an eating disorder. These include but are not limited to the following:

- **Primary care physicians**
- **Nurse practitioners**
- **Mental health professionals**
- **Nutrition counselors**
- **Psychiatrists, Psychologists**

## **For More Info**

**Mental Health America** – [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

**National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders** – [www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org)

**National Eating Disorders Association-** [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

**National Institute of Mental Health-** [www.nimh.nih.gov/](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/)

**Something Fishy-** [www.something-fishy.org](http://www.something-fishy.org)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** – [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## **Helplines**

**American Psychiatric Association Answer Center** – 1888-35-PSYCH (77924)

**American Psychological Association Public Education Line-** 1-800-964-2000

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline-** 1-800-273-TALK (8255)