

What Are Eating Disorders?



In the United States, nearly 30 million Americans will have an eating disorder at some point in their lifetime. Eating disorders are real, but treatable mental and physical illnesses that can have fatal health consequences. They are not a choice, a “fad” or a “phase.” They can affect people of all genders, ages, races, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, body shapes, and weights.

The following are the most common types of eating disorders and disordered eating:

Anorexia Nervosa (AN) involves severely restricting food intake; weight loss or lack of appropriate weight gain in growing children; difficulties maintaining an appropriate body weight for someone’s height, age, and stature; and, in many individuals, body image concerns.

Bulimia Nervosa (BN) involves a cycle of binge eating, followed by behaviors designed to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating such as self-induced vomiting, fasting, excessive exercise, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or other medications.

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) involves repeated episodes of binge eating and eating larger amounts of food often very rapidly, past the point of being full. Such binges often occur alone, in secret, and are associated with intense feelings of “loss of control” and are followed by feelings of shame, guilt, and despair.

Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorders (OSFED) applies to individuals who do not meet all the diagnostic criteria for other types of eating disorders but still have a significant illness. OSFED includes diagnoses such as Atypical Anorexia, Binge Eating Disorder and Bulimia Nervosa Disorder which occurs with less frequency and/or limited duration, Purging Disorder, and Night Eating Syndrome. It’s important to note that OSFED is just as severe as other eating disorders and is the most common type of eating disorder.

Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) involves dramatic restriction in the types or amount of food a person eats not related to distress about body shape, size, or weight. Instead, restriction of food is due to a lack of interest in eating or food, sensory sensitivity, and/or a fear of negative consequences like choking.

Disordered Eating refers to problematic eating behaviors and distorted attitudes towards food, weight, shape, and appearance, such as restricting food intake, binge eating, purging, excessive exercising or excessive use of diuretics, laxatives, and weight loss medications. While disordered eating patterns can vary in severity, they don’t meet the criteria for a diagnosable eating disorder. Although not everyone with disordered eating develops an eating disorder, it is a risk factor in the development of an eating disorder. Therefore, it’s important to seek help as early as possible since it can help prevent symptoms from becoming more severe and/or developing into an eating disorder.

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Scan QR code to get screened for an eating disorder:

