

Student Health Centre

What you need to know about Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa.



Introduction

Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa are eating disorders when the person affected has an excessive desire to remain thin and to control body shape and weight. Both disorders are much more common in women than men. People with Anorexia usually deny they have a problem. They will disguise an emaciated appearance by wearing bulky, loose-fitting clothes. On the other hand those with Bulimia often realise they have a problem with eating, but unlike Anorexia, which is a very visible condition to others, Bulimia is often disguised and kept secret for a long time. Individuals can have some of the symptoms of both disorders.

What is Anorexia Nervosa?



Anorexia is a disorder characterised by deliberate attempts to lose weight, usually by voluntary starvation, but also by inducing vomiting, abusing laxatives and exercising excessive and overwhelming desire for thinness.

Whom does Anorexia Nervosa affect?

It usually occurs in adolescent girls, often around the age of 16 or 17 years and in young women, but it may also affect older women, adolescent boys, young men and children nearing puberty. It is uncommon in women after the age of 30 years.

How common is Anorexia Nervosa?

Surveys have suggested that it affects one to two percent of adolescent girls and young women. It is much more common in females, affecting approximately 9 females to every 1 male.

What are the symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa?

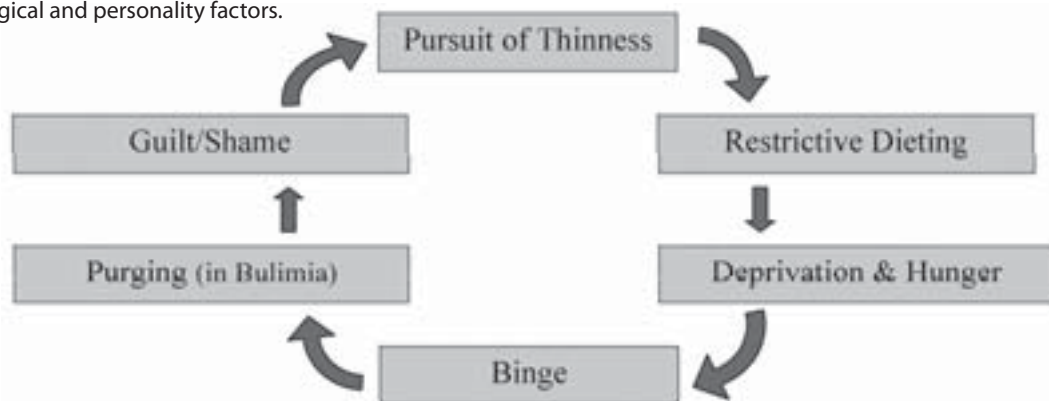


Symptoms include:

- Weight loss, often severe. .
- Setting high standards for ones self.
- Isolation.
- Excessive exercising.
- Secretive behaviour.
- Intense fear of becoming fat.
- Preoccupation with food, calories and weight.
- Distorted image of ones own body image[claiming to look and feel fat when infact very thin]
- If onset of Anorexia before puberty in boys or girls then puberty can be delayed.

What is the cause of Anorexia?

This is still uncertain. It appears to result from the interaction of a number of factors including social, cultural, biological, psychological and personality factors.



What are the physical consequences of having Anorexia?

• Intolerance to cold • Low blood pressure • Slowed heart rate • Lowered temperature • Constipation • Poor circulation • Abdominal pain • Susceptibility to infections • Growth of downy hair on body • Serious complications affecting the heart, kidneys, brain etc. that can be fatal • Osteoporosis.

What is the treatment for Anorexia Nervosa?

- ☒ This depends to some extent on the severity of the weight loss and the presence of physical symptoms.
- ☒ The person concerned may need hospitalisation particularly if there has been significant weight loss, if there has been significant weight loss, if there are serious complications, if the individual is also depressed or if out-patient treatment has failed.
- ☒ The aim of treatment is to restore and maintain an adequate weight and to establish a regular eating habit.
- ☒ Medication is not used very often.
- ☒ Education about the nature of Anorexia and about healthy eating habits is a very important part of the treatment.
- ☒ Psychological interventions such as individual Psychotherapy and family therapy are the main forms of treatment. Patients are encouraged to talk about personal difficulties and other issues that may be causing the eating disorder.
- ☒ Support from family and friends are very important in helping the individual to make progress.

What is Bulimia Nervosa?

Bulimia Nervosa is a disorder in which there are repeated episodes of overeating and an excessive preoccupation with control of body weight. Self-induced vomiting in order to avoid gaining weight usually follows binges. Other measures taken to avoid weight gain include starvation, taking laxatives and diuretics. However weight is usually within the normal range in Bulimia Nervosa.

Whom does Bulimia Nervosa effect?

It is much more common in women, especially young women, and it usually occurs at a slightly later age than Anorexia. i.e.9: 1.

How common is Bulimia Nervosa?

Surveys have suggested that it affects between 5-10% of young women. However Bulimia Nervosa is a disorder that is often kept secret so it is difficult to give an accurate figure.

What are the symptoms of Bulimia Nervosa?

Symptoms include:

Persistent preoccupation with eating • Irresistible craving for food • Binge eating of large amounts of food in a short period of time • During the binge there is feeling of loss of control over eating • Feelings of guilt after the binge episode followed by self-induced vomiting • Laxative abuse • Alternating periods of binge eating and starvation • Using appetite suppressants and diuretics • Fear of fatness • Over concern with body shape and weight, though body weight is more often normal in bulimia than in Anorexia • Menstrual periods are often normal but may be irregular or absent

What are the physical consequences of Bulimia Nervosa?

- ☒ Repeated vomiting leads to several complications: loss of potassium which can cause weakness, abnormalities of heart rhythm [which can be fatal], Kidney damage, erosion of the teeth and swelling of the salivary gland.
- ☒ Many of the symptoms that occur in Anorexia Nervosa can also occur in Bulimia Nervosa.

What is the treatment for Bulimia Nervosa?

The aim of the treatment is to help the individual gain control over eating such that there is a return to eating regular meals without engaging in vomiting or bingeing. A particular type of psychological intervention known as cognitive Behavioural Therapy is often used in order to help the individual change his/her faulty way of thinking. Medication has shown to be of value.

Further help

Whether you are concerned about yourself or someone else it is best to seek advice from your family doctor. Your doctor may decide that specialist help is necessary and you may be referred to a psychiatrist or a psychologist.

Bodywhys provides help, support and understanding for Anorexia and Bulimia sufferers. **Helpline 01 2835126**

With special thanks to the Health promotion unit.