What is an eating disorder?
An eating disorder occurs when a person's life revolves around weight and food.
- Some people eat too little. This is called restrictive eating.
- Some people eat too much at one time. This is called binge eating.
- Some people binge and purge. They vomit or use laxatives to get rid of the food they eat.
- Some people exercise to excess (also called obsessive or compulsive exercise). They feel anxious or angry if they miss a day, even if they're injured or sick.

Anorexia, bulimia and binge eating are all eating disorders. They involve serious medical and emotional issues. A person with an eating disorder needs help.

Many people have eating, exercise and body image problems that are unhealthy but don't fit the criteria for an eating disorder. Disordered eating, female athletic triad and muscle dysmorphia are examples.

Problems with eating and exercise can be treated. The sooner people get help, the more likely they will recover fully.

Many things can lead to an eating disorder
- **Dieting** may be the first step in some cases. But many people diet without developing eating disorders.
- **Body image** is a factor. Society's focus on thinness has a big impact. Many people risk their health to look like the models and actors they see in the media.
- **Emotional issues** are behind most eating disorders. Some people use food and exercise to feel in control. Others eat in response to stress. Some people switch between eating too little and eating too much.

It's very important to get help with the issues behind an eating disorder.

To Learn More
Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders
847-831-3438
www.anred.com

The National Eating Disorders Association
800-931-2237
www.edap.org

The National Eating Disorders Screening Program
781-239-0071
www.nmisp.org

“My counselor helped me understand my eating problem and deal with it before it became serious.”
Who’s at risk?
Young women are at highest risk for eating and body image problems. But women of all ages, as well as men, can have problems too.

People most at risk may have:
- low self-esteem and/or depression
- problems with family or friends
- a desire to be “perfect”
- family or friends who focus on weight
- activities or careers that require a certain body type or weight (modeling, dancing, weight lifting, wrestling)

What are the signs?
A person may not be happy with his or her body.

She or he might:
- Hate the thought of any body fat.
- Exercise often to burn calories.
- Use steroids or supplements.

A person may have odd eating habits.

She or he might:
- Skip meals often.
- Eat at meal times, but cut back a lot on food at one or all meals.
- Eat the same thing day after day or meal after meal.
- Have conflicts with family and/or friends over how much or when to eat.

A person may have issues with food.

She or he might:
- Think about food all the time.
- Have secret eating binges and feel unable to stop.
- Vomit or use laxatives and/or diuretics after eating.

If you or a friend has some of these signs, talk to a counselor or other health professional. They can help.

Helping a friend
If you think a friend may have a problem, there are things you can do to help.

Focus on the positive:
- Express concern. Talk about your friend’s health and happiness rather than his or her eating behaviors.
- Be patient and be there. Listen and care. Point out strengths and praise talents.
- Encourage your friend to seek professional help. Offer to go along to the first visit.

Avoid the negative:
- Don’t give advice (unless asked for it). Don’t nag or criticize.
- Don’t be part of talk that focuses just on food, body size or weight.
- Don’t expect your friend to change overnight. Change can take time.

Who can help?
Some or all of these people may team up to help:
- Internists and family practice physicians can check health status.
- Therapists, social workers and counselors can help people deal with the issues behind the problem.
- Dietitians can help set new eating patterns and increase the variety of foods eaten.
- Support groups can’t replace professional treatment. But they can provide contact with people who understand.
- Hospital care may be needed if there are severe medical or mental concerns.

Steps to Recovery
An eating disorder can be life-threatening. People who get better usually take these steps:

- They notice they have a problem with eating and body image.
- They get professional help from someone trained to treat eating disorders.
- They learn about eating. They learn how to nourish their bodies with a wide variety of foods. They learn how much food their bodies really need.
- They learn about feelings. They learn how they’ve used food to cope. They learn other ways to express and deal with their feelings.
- They learn to accept their bodies. They learn to value themselves for who they are, not for how they look or what they weigh.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder or Condition</th>
<th>Warning Signs</th>
<th>What Can Happen Over Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anorexia</strong></td>
<td>Physical/Feelings</td>
<td>Eating and Exercise Habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Weight loss to below 15% of normal weight.</td>
<td>• Eats too little at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Extreme fear of gaining weight.</td>
<td>• Denies hunger and skips meals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of menstrual cycle.</td>
<td>• Thinks a lot about food and weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sensitive to cold. Feels tired and weak.</td>
<td>• Some must exercise every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Depressed, low self-esteem and/or poor body image.</td>
<td>• May binge and purge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bulimia</strong></td>
<td>Physical/Feelings</td>
<td>Eating and Exercise Habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Usually at or near normal body weight.</td>
<td>• Eats too much at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teeth lose enamel. Cheeks swell. Hands and fingers get calluses.</td>
<td>• Eats in secret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of menstrual cycle.</td>
<td>• Purges by vomiting, using diuretics or laxatives, or exercising too much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tired and weak. Fainting spells.</td>
<td>• Thinks a lot about food and weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Depressed, low self-esteem and/or poor body image.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Binge Eating/Compulsive Overeating*
Eating too much at one time on a regular basis.

- Usually overweight or obese.
- Feels out of control.
- Frequent weight changes.
- Depressed, low self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Must eat, even when not hungry.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eats too much or too little at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eats late at night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often doesn’t exercise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Frequent weight changes can damage health. |
| Increased risk for type 2 diabetes. |
| Increased risk for heart disease. |

### Disordered Eating
Eating too little or too much at one time. Unusual food and exercise habits.

- Poor body image.
- Tired and weak.
- Weight changes.

| Skips meals. |
| Eats too little or too much at one time. |
| Thinks a lot about food and weight. |
| Some must exercise every day. |

| Shows early signs of an eating disorder. |
| Can turn into full-blown eating disorder. |

### Female Athlete Triad
Seen in physically active women. Includes disordered eating, loss of menstrual cycle and weaker bones.

- Low body weight.
- Tired and weak.
- Decreased athletic performance.
- Frequent injuries. Stress fractures.
- Depression.

| Restricts eating. |
| Binge eats and then purges. |
| Thinks a lot about food and weight. |
| Must exercise every day. |

| Can shorten or ruin athletic career. |
| Has medical problems that go with an eating disorder. |
| Brittle, weak bones. Unusual fractures. |

### Muscle Dysmorphia
Distorted body image. Person feels small, in spite of being muscular.

- Muscular build.
- Uses anabolic steroids.
- Feels ashamed of body.

| Weight lifting and related activities become the focus of life. |
| Restricts diet. Eats a very high-protein diet. |
| Must exercise every day. |
| Uses herbal and diet |

| Steroids can damage the heart, brain and other vital organs. |
| Unknown risks from using supplements not approved by FDA (Food and Drug Administration). |