If you think you may have an eating disorder or know someone who might, you can get help.
**ANOREXIA** and **BULIMIA** are serious illnesses. They are called “eating disorders.” People with these illnesses have problems with eating and food. Anorexia and bulimia are more common in women. But men can have them too. Symptoms usually begin between ages 12 and 30.

### About Anorexia

People with anorexia think about food and dieting most of the time.

**People who have anorexia:**
- Will not keep up a normal body weight for their age and height
- Are afraid of gaining weight, even though they often weigh less than normal
- Have a distorted image of their weight, size or shape and often feel heavy even when they are very thin
- May collect recipes and make fancy meals for other people
- Deny their symptoms and resist treatment

**Women with anorexia may stop having periods.**

**To lose weight, people with anorexia may:**
- Eat very little food
- Exercise a lot of the time
- Use laxatives or diuretics
- Refuse to eat with others or in public places

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### About Bulimia

People with bulimia eat large amounts of food in a short period of time. This is called “binge eating.”

**People who have bulimia:**
- Feel they have no control during binges
- Average two eating binges a week for at least three months
- Binge and eat in secret
- Swallow food quickly, with little chewing
- End binges by making themselves throw up
- Feel guilty and depressed after binging
- Have tooth decay and other dental problems from throwing up so much

**To control their weight, people with bulimia may:**
- Make themselves throw up
- Use laxatives or diuretics
- Diet
- Fast
- Exercise very hard

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### Similarities

People with anorexia and bulimia tend to be high achievers. They are overly influenced by social pressure to be thin. Both may often feel depressed.

### Differences

**Bulimia is more common than anorexia.** It usually begins in the late teens or early twenties. At least 5% of college women have bulimia. People with bulimia are often outgoing, angry and impulsive. Alcoholism, shoplifting and emotional “ups and downs” are common in people with bulimia.

Unlike anorexia, bulimia does not lead to severe weight loss. This can make bulimia hard to detect.

Anorexia can begin as early as age 12 or 13. About 1% of teenage girls have anorexia.

People with anorexia tend to worry a lot. They resist change. Many believe they must be perfect.

People with anorexia or bulimia often deny that they are ill. They refuse to get treated. Without treatment these eating disorders can be life threatening.
Treatment

Bulimia can last a long time. But therapy can reduce and even stop symptoms. Medicine can also help people with bulimia.

People with anorexia usually will not seek help. They often must be put in a hospital to bring their weight back to normal. This can take from 2 to 6 months. Patients usually need long-term therapy after they go home.

Getting Help

If you think you have an eating disorder or know someone who might, you can get help.

There are people who are specially trained to work with eating disorders. Doctors, counselors, dietitians, social workers and psychologists can all help. These are listed in the yellow pages of your phone book.

For lower fees, look under “social service agencies” or “mental health agencies.”

Many HMOs offer counseling. Your employer may have a program that offers help.

As with other health care providers, if you don’t like the first counselor you see, try someone else.

Admitting I had an eating disorder was hard. But my counselor is helping me get better.