



# EATING DISORDERS

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## **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DIETING AND AN EATING DISORDER?**

There is a marked difference between dieting and eating disorders: dieting might be motivated by a desire to lose weight coupled with a genuine wish to improve overall health and nutrition. Eating disorders, however, are dominated by an obsession with weight loss that negatively affects a person's life and health, and is characterized by preoccupation with food, calorie counting, and, in some cases, excessive exercise. Even more, individuals suffering from an eating disorder have a distorted perception of their own weight and body image (e.g., they actually see themselves as obese even when they're not).



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# **ANOREXIA NERVOSA**

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## WHAT IS ANOREXIA NERVOSA?

Anorexia Nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by an intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted body image. Some markers of anorexia include severe restriction of caloric intake and excessive exercise. In some cases, individuals might also engage in binge-eating, eating large amounts of food in one sitting, followed by “purging”, or forcible elimination or regurgitation of the consumed food, through vomiting or laxative use is practiced. Individuals suffering from anorexia nervosa might attain a dangerously low body weight, but continue to perceive themselves as overweight. Individuals with anorexia may have low self-esteem and poor body image. Anorexia appears at a higher frequency among women than men, with a typical age of onset between 16 and 18 years old.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF LEFT UNTREATED?

Individuals with anorexia nervosa can attain extremely low body mass, potentially causing damage to organs like the heart, kidneys, and brain. As a result, the person might experience abnormal heart rhythms or electrolyte imbalance, both of which can be life-threatening. A person suffering from Anorexia Nervosa can also be at risk for other mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, substance use, self-harm behavior, and suicide. Treatment of this disorder requires a multidisciplinary team made up of a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and clinical dietitian.



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**BULIMIA  
NERVOSA**

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## **WHAT IS BULIMIA NERVOSA?**

Bulimia Nervosa is an eating disorder characterized by a loss of control over eating behavior, whereby an individual engages in a cycle of “binge-eating” episodes, during which they eat large amounts of food during one sitting, followed by “purging”, during which they attempt to eliminate the food they’ve eaten by inducing vomiting or using laxatives. The emotion driving the purging is extreme guilt over the amount of food consumed. Feelings of shame are common after a bingeing-purging episode. Individuals with bulimia nervosa may diet strictly, fast, or exercise excessively, and have low self-esteem and poor body image..

## **WHAT HAPPENS IF LEFT UNTREATED?**

Bulimia nervosa is typically treated with medications and/or psychotherapy. If left untreated, recurrent and prolonged binge-and-purge cycles may disrupt the digestive system leading to electrolyte imbalance, which could disrupt the function of other vital organs such as the heart.