

New England Eating Disorders Program

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What Is an Eating Disorder?

Diagnostic Criteria of Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are dangerous mental illnesses that can drastically impact physical and psychological health. Having the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses, eating disorders require careful evaluation and diagnostic considerations. The diagnostic criteria, used by clinicians to better communicate about disorders, of some of the most common eating disorders are summarized below.

Binge-Eating Disorder

- Binge eating which involves some combination of:
 - Eating larger amounts of food than what most people would eat, in a short amount of time
 - Feeling out of control over amount of food eaten or the inability to stop eating
 - Eating quicker than normal
 - Eating until feeling uncomfortably full and/or when not hungry
 - Feeling shame, guilt, sadness, and/or disgust
 - Eating alone due to embarrassment
- Binge eating at least once a week for three months
- No regular use of behaviors to avoid weight gain following binge eating (e.g., self-induced vomiting, excessive exercise)

Bulimia Nervosa

- Episodes of binge eating (see above)
- Purging, the compensatory response to binge eating, to prevent weight gain (e.g., self-induced vomiting; misuse of laxatives, diuretics or other medications; fasting; excessive exercise)
- Binge eating and purging both occur at least once a week for three months
- Preoccupation with weight and shape as a means to evaluate self

Anorexia Nervosa

- Severe food restriction leading to significantly low body weight or weight loss
- Extreme fear of weight gain or of becoming fat, or behavior that interferes with weight gain
- Preoccupation with weight and shape, distorted perspective of one's body, or lack of insight into the dangers of low body weight

Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder

- An eating disturbance leading to failure to meet nutritional and/or energy needs and characterized by one of the following:
 - Lack of interest in food/eating
 - Avoidance of food based on sensory characteristics
 - Concern with an unwanted outcome of eating
- The eating disturbance leads to one or more of the following:
 - Weight loss
 - Nutritional deficiency
 - Dependence on enteral feeding or nutritional supplements
 - Disturbance in psychosocial functioning
- No distortion or preoccupation with body weight or shape

If any of the above criteria describes you or a loved one, please seek professional help by calling our confidential intake line at (207) 294-4522.