



Trends is published regularly throughout the school year by **Cornerstone Day School** as a service to New Jersey school professionals. Each issue highlights one important topic with practical applications for those working with students with emotional problems.

TRENDS

EATING DISORDERS IN ADOLESCENTS: IDENTIFICATION AND TREATMENT

What Are Eating Disorders?

Eating disorders are serious conditions related to persistent eating behaviors that negatively impact health, emotions and the ability to function in important areas of life. The most common eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder.

An adolescent with anorexia refuses to stay at a normal body weight. Someone with bulimia has repeated episodes of binge eating followed by compulsive behaviors such as vomiting or the use of laxatives to rid the body of food. Binge eating is characterized by uncontrolled overeating.

More than 90% of youth struggling with an eating disorder are girls. However, adolescent boys may also be obsessed with body image. They may strive for the perfect body by dieting or through compulsive exercise.

Youth with eating disorders are often in denial that anything is wrong. They may be moody, anxious, or depressed. They may withdraw from friends, and become overly sensitive to criticism. The problem arises when adults are not aware of these symptoms because the teen keeps them hidden, just like the trauma, insecurities, depression, or low self-esteem that may trigger the disorder.

Major Types of Eating Disorders

Binge-Eating Disorder

Binge-eating disorder is a condition where individuals lose control over their eating and have reoccurring episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food. Unlike bulimia nervosa, periods of binge-eating are not followed by purging, excessive exercise, or fasting. As a result, youth with binge-eating disorder often are overweight or obese. Binge-eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the U.S.

Symptoms include:

- Eating unusually large amounts of food in a specific amount of time, such as a 2-hour period
- Eating even when you're full or not hungry
- Eating fast during binge episodes
- Eating until you're uncomfortably full
- Eating alone or in secret to avoid embarrassment
- Feeling distressed, ashamed, or guilty about your eating
- Frequently dieting, possibly without weight loss

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is a condition where people avoid food, severely restrict food, or eat very small quantities of only certain foods. They also may weigh themselves repeatedly. Even when dangerously underweight, they may see themselves as overweight. They may engage in binge eating episodes, eating large amounts of food in a short time followed by vomiting or using laxatives or diuretics to get rid of what was consumed.

Symptoms include:

- Extremely restricted eating
- Extreme thinness (emaciation)
- A relentless pursuit of thinness and unwillingness to maintain a normal or healthy weight
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Distorted body image, a self-esteem that is heavily influenced by perceptions of body weight and shape, or a denial of the seriousness of low body weight

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia nervosa is a condition where people have recurrent and frequent episodes of eating unusually large amounts of food and feeling a lack of control over these episodes. This binge-eating is followed by behavior that compensates for the overeating such as forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, excessive exercise, or a combination of these behaviors. People with bulimia nervosa may be slightly underweight, normal weight, or over overweight.

Symptoms include:

- Chronically inflamed and sore throat
- Swollen salivary glands in the neck and jaw area
- Acid reflux disorder and other gastrointestinal problems

- Worn tooth enamel and increasingly sensitive and decaying teeth as a result of exposure to stomach acid
- Intestinal distress and irritation from laxative abuse
- Severe dehydration from purging of fluids

Treatment

It is important to seek treatment early for eating disorders. Adolescents with eating disorders are at higher risk for suicide and medical complications. Youth with eating disorders can often have other mental disorders (such as depression or anxiety) or problems with substance use. Complete recovery is possible.

Treatment plans are tailored to individual needs and may include one or more of the following:

- Individual, group, and/or family psychotherapy
- Medical care and monitoring
- Nutritional counseling
- Medications

To reduce or eliminate binge-eating and purging behaviors, adolescents may undergo cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which is a type of psychotherapy that helps a person learn how to identify distorted or unhelpful thinking patterns and recognize and change inaccurate beliefs.

To learn more:

- Eating Disorders in Teens: https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teenagers-With-Eating-Disorders-002.aspx
- Eating disorders in adolescents: Principles of diagnosis and treatment - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2851329/>



"Integrating state of the art psychiatric treatment and outstanding academics within a dynamic school environment."