

Eating Disorders in Youth – Striving to be Thin

An estimated 10-15 million people - 11% to 30% of young adults - have eating disorders...and 86% of them begin before age 20.

While overweight and obesity are major concerns for America's teens today affecting nearly 10% according to the Centers for Disease Control, between 11% and 30% are affected by other diet-related conditions known as eating disorders. Society's obsession with thinness drives many teens and young adults to pursue extreme dietary practices in an effort to be thin.

Anorexia (self-starvation) and bulimia (binging and purging) are two of the most common eating disorders of teenagers, but a host of other *eating disorders not otherwise specified* (EDNOS) have been identified in adolescents and young adults, as well. Eating disorders not only pose some serious nutritional concerns at a time when nutrient needs are greatest, but are tied to a variety of other psychological, emotional and social issues.

While eating disorders are more common among adolescent and college-aged girls, an estimated 10% of those diagnosed are boys. Individuals with anorexia are at risk of delayed or impaired sexual maturation; nutrient deficiencies that become apparent in the skin, hair, and organs; and will often experience osteoporosis, establishing a life-long struggle with weak or brittle bones and increased susceptibility to bone breaks.

Individuals with bulimia may experience inadequate nutrient absorption; mouth sores, tooth decay, and tissue damage to the esophagus from excessive vomiting; as well as bloody diarrhea and damage to the intestines and colon from laxative-abuse.

If an eating disorder is suspected in a friend or family member, seek professional assistance right away. Treatment by a multi-disciplinary team is necessary as soon as an eating disorder is confirmed and may last for many years to restore and maintain good health.

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