

Eating Disorders

As many as 10 million females suffer from eating disorders in the U.S. and more than half of teenage girls use unhealthy weight control behaviors, according to the National Eating Disorders Association. Because of the secretiveness and shame associated with anorexia and bulimia, they often go undetected and untreated.

Top 5 Signs of Anorexia or Bulimia:

1. **Extreme food restriction:** The teen undergoes a drastic change in her eating habits. For instance, she is only willing to accept really small portions and then pushes them around the plate instead of eating them.
2. **Perception of her body or parts of her body as extremely large when that is not the case:** This may result in a change in clothing style. For example, a daughter who has lost a lot of weight is now wearing baggy clothing.
3. **Disappearance of food from the refrigerator or pantry:** Bingers usually binge in secret, so keep an eye out for pantries or fridges that have been emptied of their contents, as well as large amounts of empty food wrappers either in the garbage or stashed in some out of the way place.
4. **Excessive, compulsive exercise:** An obsession with exercising -- for instance, several times a day, or to the point of complete exhaustion.
5. **Extreme weight loss or marked fluctuations in weight:** Dramatic weight loss can be a sign of anorexia, but it is important to remember that not all eating disorders result in weight loss. Many bulimics are normal weight and they can even be overweight. That doesn't make their eating disordered behavior any less dangerous. Watch out for frequent trips to the bathroom after meals and excessive exercise (specifically, increased discussion about needing to burn off calories). If you find any evidence that your child has been abusing laxatives or diet pills, confront her immediately.

The earlier a patient is diagnosed and treated with an eating disorder, the more likely they will recover completely. However, according to Walden Behavioral Care, one of the country's leading programs for treating eating disorders, prolonged bouts with bulimia and anorexia that go untreated can result in osteoporosis, retarded growth, kidney problems, ulcers, heart failure, and even death.

What Moms Can Do about Eating Disorders

There are steps moms can take to help prevent their children from developing eating disorders. According to the National Eating Disorder Association, parents should practice healthy body image attitudes and sensible eating habits for children to emulate.

Educate yourself and your children about the dangers associated with risky dieting and the importance of eating balanced meals consisting of a variety of foods. Encourage exercise, and do not avoid activities such as swimming because of insecurities about wearing a bathing suit.

Instilling healthy self-esteem in a child may be one of the most effective ways to stop him/her from practicing dangerous behaviors to change her body.

If you suspect that your son or daughter may have an eating disorder, the Harris Center at Massachusetts General Hospital suggests first meeting with a referred therapist without your child to discuss how to best approach him/her.

Once you talk to your son or daughter, express your love and tell him or her that you alone are concerned. This way he/she will not feel ganged up on by loved ones. If the child becomes angry or denies having a problem, remain calm. Remind the child that a parent worries and only wants to help him/her receive the support he/she deserves.

You may have to talk to your child multiple times before he/she agrees to get help -- even if the child knows he/she suffers from an eating disorder.

Some children need space before discussing a treatment plan. Others feel more comfortable knowing their parents have already made arrangements for help. This depends on the personality of your child. Work with a therapist experienced in eating disorders to help your child get the proper treatment.

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Related Momlogic Stories on Eating Disorders

1. [My Daughter is an Anorexic](#)
2. [Painfully Thin Girls](#)
3. [Is Being Thin Worth Dying?](#)

Additional Resources for Eating Disorders

- [Harris Center](#)
- [National Eating Disorders Association](#)