

# Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

Facts For Families

## Eating Disorders

An Eating Disorder is a psychological condition that shows itself in unhealthy and extreme eating habits. There are four types of eating disorders that are characterized by specific behaviors. Two primary behaviors are binge-eating, the consumption of a large amount of food in a short period of time accompanied by feelings of loss of control, and purging or self-induced vomiting. Misuse of laxatives, diet pills, or water pills, or intense excessive exercising after bingeing are also considered purging.

**Bulimia Nervosa** is the most common of the four diagnoses. It is characterized by preoccupation with food and weight, bingeing and a compensation for bingeing by purging, excessive exercise or fasting. This pattern is accompanied by shame and secrecy. Individuals with Bulimia Nervosa cannot be identified on the basis of weight—many are normal weight or even overweight.

**Anorexia Nervosa** is characterized by a refusal to maintain a normal weight for one's height, body type, age and activity level; restriction of food intake due to an intense fear of becoming "fat" or gaining weight (extreme concern over one's weight); body image misperception and loss of two consecutive menstrual periods in females.

**Binge-eating Disorder** is characterized by bingeing, feelings of shame and self-hatred associated with bingeing, but not accompanied by purging.

**Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified** covers all maladaptive eating behaviors that do not fit into the above diagnoses. Examples include: restricting food intake, meeting some but not all of the requirements for the above diagnoses, chewing food and spitting it out, or bingeing and purging irregularly.

*How it affects my child*  
Of the currently more than 10 million Americans afflicted with eating disorders,

- 90 percent are children and adolescents.
- The average age of eating disorder onset has dropped from 13-17 to 9-12.
  - The number of males with eating disorders has doubled during the past decade.

**Children with an eating disorder may experience:**

*Physical problems* (many that can be life-threatening) such as:

- Excessive weight loss
- Irregular or absence of menstruation in females
- Hair loss
- Severe digestive system problems
- Damaged vital organs
- Tooth and gum problems
- Swollen salivary glands due to induced vomiting
- General malnutrition
- Dehydration
- Thinning of the bones resulting in osteoporosis or osteopenia

*Emotional issues* such as:

- Low-self-esteem and a poor body image
- Being prone to mood swings, perfectionism and depression
- Strained relationships with family and friends
- Performing poorly in academic situations
- Suffering from other psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug dependencies

Children's  
Mental  
Health  
Matters.org  
A MARYLAND PUBLIC  
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

coordinated by

mhamd   
MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND

MCF  
maryland coalition of families

[www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org)

What can we do about it?

**Build children's self-esteem based on their positive traits.** Be as supportive and encouraging as you can in raising children. Also, always try to highlight the positive points of their personalities and praise them for their good behaviors. Do not expect them to be perfect.

**Serve as a healthy role model for your children.** Do not diet. The key to developing a healthy lifestyle is to practice moderation both in eating and exercising.

**Construct a healthy relationship with food.** Make meal time a fun time by gathering all family members together and enjoying a variety of healthy foods. Never turn meal time into a power struggle between you and your child by rewarding or punishing him/her for his/her behavior with food.

**Teach your children to respect differences in body structure and feel good about their appearances.** Avoid labeling your children regarding weight and commenting about other people's weight and appearance as an indicator of their character and personality. Not all people resemble thin models and movie stars, so you should teach children that everyone is born with a unique body shape which is mostly influenced by family history. Encourage a realistic and positive body image.

**Watch for warning signs.** If you notice a change in your child's dietary behavior, such as anxiety around meal time, avoidance of social situations involving food, food rituals, visiting the bathroom soon after meals, rapid fluctuation in weight, overeating or hoarding, it is a good idea to seek the advice of a mental health professional.

**Taking care of yourself.** A battle with an eating disorder can be long and difficult, especially for parents. Do not blame yourself. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, it is wise to seek professional help. Remember, you cannot help your child without being healthy yourself.

### Resource/Links

#### **Children's Mental Health Matters!**

*Facts for Families – First Steps in Seeking Help*  
[www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org)

**American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry**  
This site contains resources for families to promote an understanding of mental illnesses.  
[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

*Facts for families with teenagers with eating disorders*  
[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Teenagers-With-Eating-Disorders-002.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Teenagers-With-Eating-Disorders-002.aspx)

**American Psychiatric Association**  
*Common Questions about Eating Disorders*  
<https://treatingeatingdisorders.com>

**KidsHealth for Parents**  
<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/eat-disorder.html?WT.ac=ctg#catproblems>

**Maudsely Parents** is a site for parents of children with eating disorders.  
<http://www.maudsleyparents.org/>

**National Association of Anorexia and Associated Disorders**  
<http://www.anad.org>

**National Eating Disorders Association**  
*Parent Toolkit*  
<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/sites/default/files/nedaw18/1.%20ParentToolkit.pdf>

**National Institute of Mental Health**  
NIMH strives to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery, and cure. Visit NIMH for information on clinical trial and mental health information, statistics and resources.  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

*Facts About Eating Disorders and the Search for Solutions*  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>

**NOVA: Dying to be Thin** investigates the causes, complexities, and treatments for eating disorders anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. PBS also provides a teacher's guide to the film and activities to do in the classroom. This film is accessible at:

MHAMD ~ 443-901-1550 ~ [www.mhamd.org](http://www.mhamd.org)

MCF ~ 410-730-8267 ~ [www.mdcoalition.org](http://www.mdcoalition.org)

The Children's Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with School and Community Champions across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children's mental health. For more information, please visit [www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org](http://www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org)