



Overview

Anorexia is characterised by severe starvation and weight loss, sometimes with purging and amenorrhea in females. Anorexia sufferers experience high body distortion and may mistakenly believe and feel they are overweight, no matter how underweight they may actually be.

Anorexia is characterized by the following symptoms:

- Refusal to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height.
- Intense fear of gaining weight or becoming “fat” even though underweight.
- Disturbance in the way in which one's body weight or shape is experienced, undue influence of body weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the denial of the seriousness of the current low body weight.
- The absence of menstrual cycles in girls and women who experienced this before anorexia.

There are two sub types of Anorexia Nervosa:

Restricting Type: Weight loss is accomplished primarily through dieting, fasting, or excessive exercise. Individuals in this sub type do not regularly engage in binge eating or purging.

Binge eating/purging type: Individuals regularly engage in binge eating or purging (or both). Most individuals with anorexia nervosa who binge eat also purge through self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas. Some individuals do not binge eat, but do regularly purge after the consumption of small amounts of food.

Many of the physical signs and complications of anorexia are attributed to starvation.

It is important when noticing warning signs to look for clusters of symptoms.

Physical warning signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- Noticeably thin and continues to lose weight
- Obsessive exercise
- Losing hair or experiences thinning of hair
- Feeling cold when the temperature is normal
- Menstruation ceases in post puberty women
- Lethargy
- Insomnia

Behavioural warning signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- Intense fear of gaining weight or being “fat”
- Preoccupied with food, weight, calories and dieting.
- Denies that he/she is hungry
- Making excuses to avoid meal times or social outing with family or friends
- Obsessive measuring of body parts and persistently using a mirror to check for perceived areas of “fat”
- Rigid or fixated behaviour attached to food
- Wearing big or baggy clothes

Psychological warning signs of Anorexia Nervosa

- Low self esteem
- Obsessive thoughts about food and weight
- Weighing self frequently
- Perfectionism and self criticism
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Often will be in denial of the seriousness of the problem
- A strong need to control ones environment
- Inflexible thinking

Complications of Anorexia Nervosa



- Slow heart rate
- Low blood pressure
- Low blood sugar
- Reduction of bone density (osteoporosis)
- Muscle wasting
- Brittle, thin and fragile nails
- Loss of hair
- Fine hair appearing on face, trunk and limbs
- Cavities in teeth
- Gums may recede resulting in infection and tooth loss
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Nervous irritability
- Dry, rough and flaky skin
- Severe dehydration which can result in kidney failure
- Anemia
- Poor circulation - feeling cold on extremities
- Peripheral edema

Where to go for help

It is important that if you believe you or someone you know has an eating disorder to seek professional assistance immediately. It can be scary and frightening to make this first step however the earlier help is sought the quicker the road to recovery. If you require a referral to a general practitioner or other health practitioner practicing in the eating disorder field please feel free to contact The Butterfly Foundation for a list of names and numbers.