

Signs Your Child May Have an Eating Disorder



Fig. 1

And What to do Next

What Exactly is an Eating Disorder?

Eating disorders are a group of mental illnesses marked by an unhealthy fixation on food. This fixation can manifest itself as extensive food rules, under eating, or rapidly consuming large amounts of food. Eating disorders are often accompanied by a change in physical appearance, mood, and behaviors.

"Many eating disorders begin as a way of gaining control"

Many eating disorders begin as a way of gaining control when life feels chaotic, and most disorders seem to coexist with other psychological disorders.

People with eating disorders often withdraw from friends and family as their obsession with food intensifies. They may exhibit signs of depression and anxiety as their body image worsens as the disorder progresses. While these behaviors alone may not be indicative of an eating disorder, they can be early warnings of abnormal eating patterns.

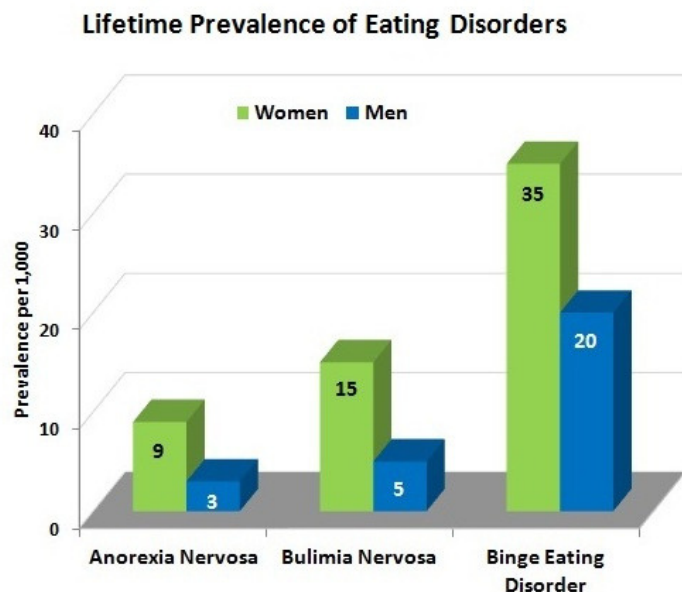


Fig. 2

© www.mirror-mirror.org

Who is Most at Risk of Developing an Eating Disorder?

As the above graph shows, females are three times more likely than males to develop anorexia or bulimia, and nearly twice as likely to develop a binge eating disorder in their lifetimes. This increased risk is due to several physical, biological, and social factors. For example, people that tend towards perfectionism are more likely to develop an eating disorder. Other risk factors include being bullied about weight, having a close relative with an eating disorder, and body image dissatisfaction (1).

The Three Most Common Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa



Fig. 3

Anorexia nervosa is perhaps the most recognizable eating disorder. It is characterized by low body weight, infrequent eating, eating extremely small quantities of food, and excessive exercise. People who suffer from anorexia nervosa often become withdrawn from friends and family, may have difficulty concentration, and may suffer from fatigue due to problems sleeping.

If you are concerned that your child may suffer from anorexia nervosa, here are some things to watch out for:

- Regularly preparing food without eating it
- Refusal to eat in front of others
- Increasing exercise without increasing caloric intake
- Becoming increasingly withdrawn or moody
- Talking about dieting or being on a diet

Bulimia Nervosa



Fig. 4

Bulimia nervosa is the next most common and recognizable eating disorder. It is characterized by rapid consumption of large amounts of food called a "binge" followed by a purging event. Purging can consist of vomiting, using laxatives, or excessive exercise. Unlike anorexia nervosa, people suffering from bulimia tend to be slightly over weight. This is because the body absorbs a large percentage of the calories from binges before purging can occur.

If you suspect your child may have bulimia nervosa, watch out for these behaviors:

- Going to the bathroom immediately after most meals
- Refusal to eat in front of others
- Constantly brushing teeth, chewing minty gum, or using mouthwash
- Hiding food for later binges
- Moody behavior

Binge Eating Disorder



Fig. 5

Binge eating disorder is one of the newest to be considered a disorder (2) but has quickly grown in number of cases.

Binge eating disorder is characterized by eating larger quantities of food in a certain period than the average person would eat during that time. Simply put, binge eating disorder is when a person rapidly eats a large amount of food, usually "junk" foods. A person who binges is often very secretive about eating, as they feel shame about the sheer amount of food they consume.

If you suspect your child may suffer from binge eating disorder, here is what to look for (3):

- Hoards food
- Frequently diets
- Weight fluctuations
- Withdraws from usual activities
- Food rituals like only eating a specific food group

Note:

While your child may occasionally over or under eat, it must be a sustained practice to be considered an eating disorder

Prevalence of Each Disorder

While anorexia and bulimia nervosa are most commonly thought of when eating disorders are mentioned, they are not the most prevalent among people with eating disorders

Percentage of Men and Women Aged 12-35 With Eating Disorders

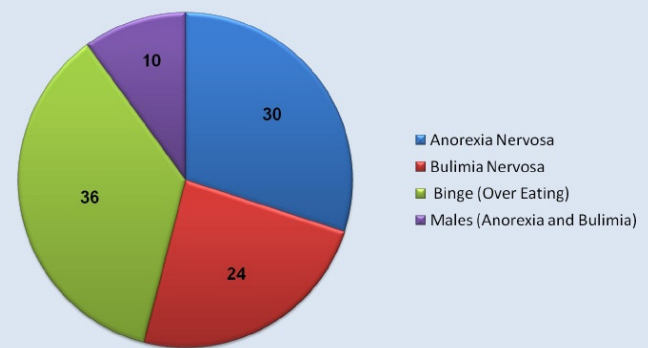


Fig. 6

As the chart above shows, the most common eating disorder is also the newest to be considered a disorder: binge eating.

Some possible reasons this disorder has spiked in popularity is due to the average American's relationship to food. Think about it: How do Americans celebrate an important occasion or comfort themselves after loss? By eating a big meal and a huge dessert.

America is a country obsessed with body image, yes, but also obsessed with food, which makes developing binge eating disorder that much more likely.

I Think My Child Has an Eating Disorder. What Now?

If you suspect your child has an eating disorder, it is very important to react in the proper way. Your child is already suffering and mishandling the situation will only make matters worse. Before you reach out for professional help, here are a few things to remember when you talk to your child (4):

DO

- ✓ Carefully choose a time and place where you will not be interrupted
- ✓ Explain why you're concerned
- ✓ Ask if your child has reasons for wanting to change

DON'T

- ✗ Comment on their weight/appearance
- ✗ Give simple solutions
- ✗ Blame them for the situation

After Determining That Your Child has an Eating Disorder,

You can start looking into treatment options. An eating disorder is a serious issue that should not be ignored or downplayed. The following resources are available to determine what the best next step is for you and your child.



Sources

In Text

- 1: NationalEatingDisorders.org (2018). Risk factors. Retrieved from <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/risk-factors>
- 2: National Institute of Mental Health (February 2016). Eating disorders. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/eating-disorders/index.shtml>
- 3: NationalEatingDisorders.org (2018). Binge eating disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/by-eating-disorder/bed>
- 4: Smith, M., Robinson, L., Segal, J. (September 2018). Helping someone with an eating disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/eating-disorders/helping-someone-with-an-eating-disorder.htm>

Images

Fig. 1: [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?sa=G&hl=en&q=eating+disorder&tbm=isch&tbs=simg:CAQSlwEJw8n_1sBWr6t8aiwELEKjU2AQaBAGVCAMMCxCwjKcIGmIKYAgDEii1D6QPhwa6D9YZmQe2D_1QFkQ-GBp0nmSefJ54nqifCNdwnnCekJ5EjGjCVgCB9o1vB5vhn6ES_1_17FJV09r-FWrFPajZeC1ClwH3R9GSTZJozlhgGry2LYsmoMgBAwLEI6u_1ggaCgoICAESBK000QAM&ved=0ahUKEwiyvrDPggjfAhXpo4MKHe7qB0EQwg4IKygA&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=4gwzxTw_O33XiM)

[sa=G&hl=en&q=eating+disorder&tbm=isch&tbs=simg:CAQSlwEJw8n_1sBWr6t8aiwELEKjU2AQaBAGVCAMMCxCwjKcIGmIKYAgDEii1D6QPhwa6D9YZmQe2D_1QFkQ-GBp0nmSefJ54nqifCNdwnnCekJ5EjGjCVgCB9o1vB5vhn6ES_1_17FJV09r-FWrFPajZeC1ClwH3R9GSTZJozlhgGry2LYsmoMgBAwLEI6u_1ggaCgoICAESBK000QAM&ved=0ahUKEwiyvrDPggjfAhXpo4MKHe7qB0EQwg4IKygA&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=4gwzxTw_O33XiM](https://www.google.com/search?sa=G&hl=en&q=eating+disorder&tbm=isch&tbs=simg:CAQSlwEJw8n_1sBWr6t8aiwELEKjU2AQaBAGVCAMMCxCwjKcIGmIKYAgDEii1D6QPhwa6D9YZmQe2D_1QFkQ-GBp0nmSefJ54nqifCNdwnnCekJ5EjGjCVgCB9o1vB5vhn6ES_1_17FJV09r-FWrFPajZeC1ClwH3R9GSTZJozlhgGry2LYsmoMgBAwLEI6u_1ggaCgoICAESBK000QAM&ved=0ahUKEwiyvrDPggjfAhXpo4MKHe7qB0EQwg4IKygA&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=4gwzxTw_O33XiM)

Fig. 2: [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=lifetime+prevalence+of+eating+disorders&hl=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiSo--PgqjfAhXqz4MKHTY4DwcQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=bxrjzlBhdfKoRM)

[q=lifetime+prevalence+of+eating+disorders&hl=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiSo--PgqjfAhXqz4MKHTY4DwcQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=bxrjzlBhdfKoRM](https://www.google.com/search?q=lifetime+prevalence+of+eating+disorders&hl=en&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiSo--PgqjfAhXqz4MKHTY4DwcQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=bxrjzlBhdfKoRM)

Fig 3: [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=trastornos+de+la+alimentacion&hl=en&biw=1366&bih=610&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi8np3rg6jfAhUD94MKHRNCA0kQ_AUIDigB#imgsrc=WD5m-P7R5XAkZM)

[q=trastornos+de+la+alimentacion&hl=en&biw=1366&bih=610&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi8np3rg6jfAhUD94MKHRNCA0kQ_AUIDigB#imgsrc=WD5m-P7R5XAkZM](https://www.google.com/search?q=trastornos+de+la+alimentacion&hl=en&biw=1366&bih=610&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi8np3rg6jfAhUD94MKHRNCA0kQ_AUIDigB#imgsrc=WD5m-P7R5XAkZM)

Fig 4: [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=Bulimia+nervosa&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_sqD_g6jfAhVjyoMKHTXKCyMQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=Adf4DOYUunuktM)

[q=Bulimia+nervosa&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_sqD_g6jfAhVjyoMKHTXKCyMQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=Adf4DOYUunuktM](https://www.google.com/search?q=Bulimia+nervosa&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_sqD_g6jfAhVjyoMKHTXKCyMQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=Adf4DOYUunuktM)

Fig 5: [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=bad+health+habits&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOlKqZhKjfAhVLRaOKHTs2CEkQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=s1f1FdRsQCrTBM)

[q=bad+health+habits&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOlKqZhKjfAhVLRaOKHTs2CEkQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=s1f1FdRsQCrTBM](https://www.google.com/search?q=bad+health+habits&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOlKqZhKjfAhVLRaOKHTs2CEkQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=610#imgsrc=s1f1FdRsQCrTBM)

Fig 6: [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=eating+disorder+statistics+uk&biw=1366&bih=610&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjoq8K5hKjfAhUGRKwKHV9MDisQ_AUIDygC#imgsrc=iEEdoUYmEw_ByM)

[q=eating+disorder+statistics+uk&biw=1366&bih=610&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjoq8K5hKjfAhUGRKwKHV9MDisQ_AUIDygC#imgsrc=iEEdoUYmEw_ByM](https://www.google.com/search?q=eating+disorder+statistics+uk&biw=1366&bih=610&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjoq8K5hKjfAhUGRKwKHV9MDisQ_AUIDygC#imgsrc=iEEdoUYmEw_ByM)