Eating disorders (EDs) are mental and physical illnesses in which the people experience severe disturbances in their eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. These disturbances involve inadequate or excessive intake of food which ultimately results in damage of one's entire body functionality. Eating disorder issues can develop during any stage in life but typically appear during the teen years or young adulthood. Although these illnesses are treatable, the symptoms and consequences can be detrimental and deadly if not addressed properly. Eating disorders commonly coexist with other conditions, such as psychiatric disorders like anxiety, panic, obsessive compulsive disorder, drug abuse problems, or depression.

**CAUSES**

EDs are complex disorders, influenced by a number of factors. Though the exact cause of eating disorders is unknown, it is generally believed that a combination of biological, psychological, or environmental abnormalities contribute to the development of these illnesses.

Normally emotional people and the ones with psychological problems develop these disorders. People with lack of confidence and low self-esteem can also suffer from an eating disorder. Abnormal relationships also contribute to these diseases.

These disorders are also caused genetically and transfer from generation to generation. Furthermore, people who remain in tension, stress, and depression may also face an eating disorder.

They are also caused by peer pressure and nowadays social media influence is also one of the main causes of eating disorders. People tend to attain figures like celebrities and end up being a victim of these illnesses.

**TYPES OF EATING DISORDERS**

The most common types of eating disorders are Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder.

**ANOREXIA NERVOSA**

Anorexia nervosa is ten times as common in females as in males. People with anorexia often find that they do not allow themselves to feel full after eating. This means that they restrict the amount they eat and drink. People with anorexia are underweight and sometimes, the weight becomes so low that it is dangerous to health.

**SYMPTOMS**

The symptoms of anorexia include deliberate weight loss and an unrealistic image of one's own body size.

People with anorexia tend to lose weight by cutting off all the foods containing fats and carbohydrates from their meals. They limit the amount they intake to attain the desired body figure. The sufferers of anorexia usually weigh below 15% or less than 15% of the expected weight for their age and height. These individuals have a severe phobia of gaining weight. Even though others think of them as frail and underweight, they deny this fact and continue to lose more weight.

It's common for people with anorexia to vomit secretly after eating and not to be truthful about how much they eat. The symptoms that may develop over time, as the body goes into starvation are:

⦁ Osteopenia or osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) through loss of calcium

⦁ Hair/nails become brittle

⦁ Skin dries and can take on a yellowish cast

⦁ Menstrual periods cease

⦁ Mild anemia

⦁ Severe constipation

⦁ Drop in blood pressure, slowed breathing and pulse rates

⦁ Internal body temperature falls, causing person to feel cold all the time

⦁ Depression and lethargy

**BULIMIA NERVOSA**

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder characterised by repeated episodes of uncontrolled overeating followed by compensatory weight loss behaviours. Although people with bulimia may frequently diet and vigorously exercise, individuals with bulimia nervosa can be slightly underweight, normal weight, overweight or even obese. They often consume thousands of calories that are high in sugars, carbohydrates and fat in a very short period of time. Individuals with this disorder lose control over eating and after binge eating, due to the fear of weight gain, often throw up or use laxatives and this cycle goes on.

**SYMPTOMS**

People with bulimia do not like to sit with others while eating so that others might not know about their binge eating habits. They usually vomit out everything they eat after realising how many calories they have consumed.

Other common symptoms include:

⦁ Chronically inflamed and sore throat

⦁ Swelling of salivary glands, cheeks and face, causing sufferers to develop a “chipmunk” looking face

⦁ Constant vomiting causes gastroesophageal reflux disorder

⦁ Tooth enamel wears off and teeth begin to decay from exposure to stomach acids

⦁ Laxative abuse causes irritation, leading to intestinal problems

⦁ Diuretics (water pills) cause kidney problems

⦁ Severe dehydration from purging of fluids

**BINGE EATING**

People with binge eating disorder have frequent episodes of consuming a large amount of food within a short period of time. The difference between this illness and bulimia is that the individuals don't throw up or get rid of the food they consumed by other means. Binge eating is chronic and can lead to serious health complications.

**SYMPTOMS**

Binge eating disorder involves frequent consuming of unusually large amounts of food and feeling unable to stop eating. People with this disease may feel embarrassed about overeating and vow to stop. But they feel such a compulsion that they can't resist the urges and continue binge eating.

It includes:

⦁ Eating more rapidly than normal

⦁ Eating until feeling uncomfortably full

⦁ Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry

⦁ Eating alone because of feeling embarrassed by how much one is eating

⦁ Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed or very guilty afterward

**TREATMENT**

Eating disorders clearly illustrate the close links between emotional and physical health.

The first step in treating anorexia nervosa is to assist patients with regaining weight to a healthy level; for patients with bulimia nervosa interrupting the binge-purge cycle is key. For patients with binge eating disorder, it is important to help them interrupt and stop binges.

Although there's no sure way to prevent these disorders, if you have any of the symptoms of eating disorders, seek professional help. Your medical care provider can advise you on where and how to get help. If you think a friend or loved one has similar symptoms to these illnesses, steer her or him towards a healthier behavior and professional treatment before the situation worsens.

Psychological and physical treatment comes first. Consult physicians or psychiatrists first and then provide your loved ones with all the care they need to get rid of these disorders. Give them some of your precious time, ask them if they’re going through hard times during the recovery process and motivate them to develop a healthy lifestyle and you'll see how fast they recover and start enjoying life like every other person around them.