



## Debunking Myths of Eating Disorders

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Despite a rise in the frequency of eating disorders in the United States, widespread misunderstandings about eating disorders persist. This makes detection, diagnosis, and early intervention difficult. Everyone should learn the reality behind common eating disorder myths in order to spot these disorders and seek treatment as early as possible.

**Myth #1: “Eating disorders are exclusively a female problem.”** A study published by [Harvard University](#) in 2020 indicated that about 14.4 million American women and 6.6 million American men had experienced an eating disorder in their lifetime. Notably, [additional research](#) shows that men are being diagnosed with eating disorders at a faster rate than women, and that the number of men with eating disorders is likely underestimated because eating disorders look different in men. For example, men may be less concerned about thinness and more concerned about building muscle mass. In addition, established assessment tools often do not include symptoms exhibited primarily by men.

**Myth #2: “Only skinny people have eating disorders.”** People suffering from an eating disorder come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Media reports and other public conversations regarding eating disorders frequently center on anorexia, in which sufferers frequently exhibit the symptom of being excessively underweight. Individuals suffering from other eating disorders such as bulimia or binge eating disorder might be of any weight, and their weight can fluctuate.

**Myth #3: “Eating disorders are solely related to food.”** While eating disorders are commonly associated with overconcern about calories and weight, these illnesses also have biological, psychological, and societal roots. Because friends and family incorrectly assume that eating disorders are just about food, they frequently advise their loved ones to “just eat more,” “just eat less,” or “just eat healthier” in order to be “cured” of this condition. In reality, true recovery from eating disorders frequently necessitates a mix of medical, psychiatric, therapeutic, and nutritional intervention.

## Questions to Ask Someone With an Eating Disorder:

There are 5 key signs that identify a person who may have an eating disorder. These questions may seem direct and blunt. However, it is always better to ask than to miss important signs. Ask these questions to help detect if a person in your life is developing or living with an eating disorder.

1. Do you make yourself sick (induce vomiting) because you feel uncomfortably full?
2. Do you worry that you have lost control over how much you eat?
3. Have you recently lost more than 12 pounds in a three-month period?
4. Do you think you are too fat, even though others say you are too thin?
5. Would you say that food dominates your life?

Many people may be unaware of their signs and symptoms. If you are not sure if you or your loved one is living with an eating disorder, contact the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) for information and support.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*