



## Eating Disorders Awareness

*Evan Cobb, M.A.*

Pressures to appear thin are everywhere today. Unrealistic beauty standards on [social media](#) lead to body image concerns and eating disorders, both of which are becoming more common. Almost 1 out of every 10 Americans (~30 million people) will have an eating disorder at some point in their lives. If neglected, these conditions can become life-threatening. It's important for everyone to know enough about eating disorders to recognize the symptoms and seek treatment as soon as possible.

### What is an eating disorder?

[The National Institute of Mental Health](#) describes the four main types of eating disorders:

- *Anorexia nervosa*: restricting food and/or caloric intake due to a fear of gaining weight and/or a distorted body image.
- *Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder*: restricting the amount or type of food eaten for reasons unrelated to weight or body image (for example, food texture or fear of choking)
- *Binge eating disorder*: eating a large amount of food followed by feelings of shame, regret, guilt, or sadness
- *Bulimia nervosa*: binge eating followed by purging through laxative use, forced vomiting, or excessive exercise

### Recognizing the symptoms

Eating disorders are easiest to treat when the symptoms are recognized early so treatment can begin as soon as possible. Although each disorder is different, there are some common warning signs that can help you recognize a potential problem:

*Physical*: weight loss, GI symptoms (bloating, nausea, pain), irregular menstruation, getting full quickly, muscle cramps, feeling faint or tired, cold sensitivity, brittle nails, dry hair and skin

*Behavioral*: cooking for others but not eating, weighing frequently, “forgetting” or avoiding meals, eating in secret, developing food “allergies”, wearing baggy clothing, using diet pills or laxatives, excessive exercising

*Psychological*: anxiety about food and eating, social withdrawal, negative or distorted body image, external locus of control, perfectionism, low self-esteem, hopelessness

Talking with someone about your concerns that they may have an eating disorder isn't easy, but it can save lives. Here are some tips about [how to approach someone](#) if you've noticed some of the warning signs listed above.

## Treatment options

[Treatment](#) for eating disorders generally involves a team of professionals including medical doctors, nutrition experts, and therapists. These professionals work together to help patients learn healthier eating patterns, think in new and healthier ways about their bodies, and make plans to prevent relapse. Treatment may involve an inpatient setting, where individuals stay at a facility that provides life-saving intervention and structured programs, or an outpatient setting, where individuals are provided with resources and support but still live at home. [Effective treatment](#) often involves individual therapy, family therapy, and participation in support groups.

## Awareness makes all the difference

Efforts in [promoting awareness](#) of eating disorders have increased public knowledge and saved lives. These disorders can be effectively treated once signs and symptoms are noticed. If you think that you or someone close to you may have an eating disorder, please call the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) helpline at 1-800-931-2237 or text NEDA to 741741 for more [resources](#) 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.*