



New York State Association of
Family & Consumer Science Educators

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EATING DISORDERS: WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW

Overweight, underweight, or correct weight, Americans seem to be obsessed with body image. Television, movies, the Internet and even the radio bombard us with images and pressures to look a certain way. Is it any wonder, then, that eating disorders are increasingly diagnosed at a younger age, for both males and females, and across the spectrum of culture, race, and economic backgrounds?

The National Eating Disorders Association (www.NationalEatingDisorders.org) defines Eating Disorders as “complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal and social factors.”

Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia and Compulsive Overeating, the three most recognized diseases, all involve a preoccupation with food, weight and body image. But for most sufferers, eating disorders are much more than a fixation with food. Fasting, over eating, purging, vomiting, compulsive exercising all become means of controlling feelings and emotions that otherwise seem over-whelming. Food becomes a coping mechanism for survival.

Research shows that personality types at highest risk for anorexia or bulimia tend to be obsessive, perfectionists, over-anxious, novelty seekers and/or impulsive.

Recent studies also indicate that there may be an inherited predisposition to these diseases. A latent gene, or genes, which, when triggered by an emotional crisis or environmental factors could produce the full-fledged eating disorder.

Early diagnosis and intervention are keys to successful recovery. Eighty percent of anorexics and almost ninety percent of bulimic patients experience full or partial recovery with treatment. Recognizing and identifying symptoms is often difficult, however.

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Typically, the disease begins in pre-teens and early adolescence when young bodies are changing and peer pressure to conform is most influential. Symptoms may include feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, difficulty expressing emotions and feelings, anger, anxiety, or depression. A negative change in attitudes towards oneself and a fixation on body image accompanied with an obsession on eating or not eating are often signs.

It is important that this vulnerable age group learn the basics of good nutrition, sound eating and exercising habits as well as understand what is normal development during this growth period.

Family and Consumer Sciences, Home and Career Skills, Health and Physical Education classes provide valuable knowledge enabling youngsters to make healthy choices, empowering them with the confidence to take control of their lives.

This message has been brought to you by the New York State Association of Family and Consumer Science Educators.

"Our mission is to prepare individuals to be competent, confident and caring in managing their personal, family and career lives."

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