

Disordered Eating

The term “disordered eating” refers to a wide range of behaviors. The four main types of behaviours are: restrictive eating, binge eating, purging, and compulsive exercise.



Restrictive Eating

Restrictive eating most often refers to restriction of caloric intake. This may occur by fasting, skipping meals, or consuming very small portions and/or low-calorie foods at mealtimes. However, restriction can come in other forms, including restriction of carbohydrate, fat and/or protein intake or consumption of a very limited variety of foods. Replacement of food with nutritional supplements and adherence to “fad diets” may also be considered forms of restrictive eating.



Binge Eating

An episode of binge eating is characterized by both of the following:

- 1) Eating an amount of food that is definitely larger than most individuals would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances;
- 2) A sense of lack of control over eating during the episode.¹



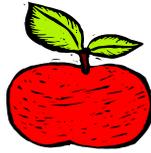
Purging

Purging refers to inappropriate compensatory behaviours used to prevent or reverse the effects of putting food into the body. It includes self-induced vomiting and misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, and/or other medications.



Compulsive Exercise

Compulsive exercise, like purging, can be a compensatory behavior used to prevent or reverse the effects of putting food into the body. It can also reflect an intense desire to build muscle. In either case, there is a compulsion to exercise for longer and more vigorously than what is considered “normal.” A person may start off with normal, good intentions to be fit and healthy, but the number of, and intensity of exercise sessions gradually increases until they develop a dependency on exercising. As things get out of control, exercise becomes not so much a choice anymore, as it is a need.²



Some people engage in only one type of disordered eating behavior. Others engage in a combination of behaviours. Some people engage in disordered eating only periodically. For others, disordered eating is a part of daily life. However, all disordered eating – regardless of form or severity – is a cause for concern.

Signs of Disordered Eating

- Increased isolation from friends and family
- Eating or not eating as a response to emotions
- Increased irritability or restlessness
- Denial of hunger and/or avoidance of meal times
- Unusual eating habits
- Obsessive interest in food preparation
- Frequent dieting or weight fluctuations
- Repeated checking of body weight or size
- Excessive exercise
- Refusal to eat
- Dental problems or hair loss
- Distorted body image
- Low self-esteem
- Depression and moodiness
- Irregular or absent menstruation
- Perfectionism
- Visiting the bathroom after or during every meal
- Hoarding food in a bedroom or a secret place
- Self-induced vomiting
- Frequent use of laxatives, diuretics or diet pills
- Food controls your life

What Can I Do?

- Acknowledge that your behavior is destructive, in need of change and that change is your choice
- Seek professional help. There is treatment available for eating disorders and you can be helped
- Talk to someone -- don't wait for others to cure you
- Remember, your selfworth is *not* based on the numbers on the scale

¹ American Psychiatric Association: *diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision*. Washington, DC. American Psychiatric Association, 2000

² *Disordered Eating: Help and Information for Eating Disorder* (<http://www.disordered-eating.co.uk/>)

Adapted from: National Eating Disorders Information Centre, Toronto; BC Eating Disorders Association, Victoria