

Eating Disorders

Eating Disorders affect a person's attitude toward food and their body. Although they are called eating disorders, they are not necessarily only about food but also about how one feels about themselves, their coping mechanisms, and other factors. There are three main eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

Prevalence and Occurrence

In Canada, anorexia nervosa affects 0.5%-4% of women, bulimia nervosa affects 1%-4% of women, and binge-eating disorder affects 2% of all people. 90% of people who are diagnosed with anorexia or bulimia are women. The binge-eating disorder affects men and women equally.

Types of Eating Disorders and Symptoms

Anorexia nervosa: This mental illness makes people think that their body is much bigger than it is. They either eat very little, do not eat, or exercise too much. Some may eat but immediately purge and eliminate the food. Due to limited eating, they do not get adequate nutrients, and so they may have heart problems, bone problems, or in women, fertility problems.

Bulimia nervosa: In this mental disorder, people eat much food in a short duration, known as binge eating. But after they finish eating, they are afraid of gaining weight and try to purge the food. Like anorexia, people with bulimia may believe their body is bigger than it is or feel that they would be a better person if they were thin. They may experience similar health problems as anorexia but can also include damage to teeth, mouth, and throat due to vomiting.

Binge-eating disorder: This mental disorder affects the way one eats. People with binge-eating disorder may eat a lot of food in a short duration (binge) on a regular basis. They cannot control the bingeing but may feel depressed, disgusted, or guilty after eating. However, unlike bulimia, they do not purge after. They may binge eat to cope with low mood, depression, anxiety, etc. This disorder increases the chance of Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, or weight issues.

Treatments that Work

Psychotherapy – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) helps the person understand the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours behind the disorder. Interpersonal therapy (IPT) helps the person with their relationships with other people. Family therapy enables the entire family to understand the disorder.

Nutritional check – Seeing a nutritionist may help one understand eating habits and create healthy meals.

Medication and hospitalization – Antidepressants can be used to treat mood problems that are related to eating disorders. Extremely low weight and health problems may lead to hospitalization.

Resources – [Eating Disorders including Anorexia and Bulimia](#), eMentalHealth.ca

References – Canadian Mental Health Association, BC: [Eating Disorders](#)

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