

Introduction to Eating Disorders (Part Two)

Bulimia Nervosa

According to National Eating Disorder Association, "Bulimia nervosa is serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by a cycle of bingeing and compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting designed to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating." People suffering from bulimia nervosa eat large amounts of food because of a lack of control which is then followed by self-induced vomiting, laxatives, diuretics (water pills), and/or excessive exercising (NEDA). According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, bulimic behavior is done secretly, because of feelings of disgust or shame and the "binging and purging" cycle usually occurs several times a week (NIMH).

Signs & Symptoms

People suffering from bulimia nervosa will appear to be of average body weight, which may make it hard to distinguish. Some signs and symptoms include large amounts of food being consumed in a short amount of time, frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, excessive exercise, bloating, dry skin, swelling of the cheeks or jaw area, sores, scars, or calluses on the back of hands and knuckles, stained or damaged teeth, withdrawal from usual friends and activities, and eating until the point of discomfort or pain (NEDA) (MayoClinic).

Health Consequences

According to the National Eating Disorder Association, "The recurrent binge-and-purge cycles can impact the entire digestive system and purge behaviors can lead to electrolyte and chemical imbalances in the body that affect the heart and other major organ functions." Other health consequences include inflammation, damage, and possible rupture of the esophagus, tooth decay, chronic irregular bowel movements, long-term constipation, irregular heartbeats, heart failure, peptic ulcers, inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis), and even death can occur from the chemical imbalances and loss of potassium and other important minerals (NEDA) (SAMHSA).

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