

ANOREXIA NERVOSA

Anorexia nervosa is a psychological eating disorder in which a person refuses to eat adequately in spite of hunger. Typically, they lose enough weight to become weak and emaciated. At times this condition may be life threatening. Often, the person eats very little, and refuses to stop dieting even after a reasonable weight loss. The body perception is distorted, and the person sees herself as "fat" when she is at normal weight or even emaciated. Anorexia nervosa primarily affects teenage and young adult females and occasionally young men. Causes include family and internal conflicts resulting in phobias about putting on weight. Slimness is identified with beauty. Many of these people are innately depressed or have severe personality disorders.

Risk factors which increase the likelihood of anorexia nervosa are: Peer pressure to be thin; history of being slightly overweight; perfectionist, compulsive or overachieving personalities; psychological stress; ballet dancers; models; cheerleaders; and athletes. Frequent signs and symptoms include: weight loss of at least 25% of their body weight; high energy level despite body wasting; intense fear of obesity; depression; appetite loss; constipation; cold intolerance; refusal to maintain a minimum standard weight for age and height; distorted body image; and, cessation of menstrual periods.

Treatment can be extremely difficult for everyone involved. It requires a multi-discipline approach, utilizing counselors, therapists, family and friends. The ultimate goal of treatment is for the patient to establish healthy eating patterns so as to regain normal weight. Relapses are frequent!

Complications of chronic anorexia nervosa include electrolyte disturbances, irregular heart beat, infections, osteoporosis, and suicide. Persons with anorexia nervosa have a high rate of attempted suicide due to low self-esteem. Hospitalization during crises, for intravenous or tube feeding is often necessary. Therapy usually continues over several years.

Additional information is available from Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, P.O. Box 5102, Eugene, OR 97405, 503-344-1144; or from Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, Box 7, Highland Park, IL 60035, 708-831-3438.

We at the Health Center will be happy to help you.



Healthfully yours,

Dr. Healthberry

For questions or comments you can;

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