

Eating Disorder

WARNING SIGNS

Recognizing the warning signs of an eating disorder is important for early intervention and support. The following list is not comprehensive but can give you an idea about some of the key signs to watch for with friends and family or note in yourself.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- **Noticeable Weight Changes:** Significant weight loss, weight gain, or fluctuations in weight, often tied to restrictive eating, binge eating, or purging behaviors.
- **Gastrointestinal Issues:** Frequent stomach pain, constipation, or acid reflux without a clear medical cause.
- **Changes in Skin, Hair, and Nails:** Dry skin, brittle nails, thinning hair, or hair loss, which can result from malnutrition.
- **Dizziness or Fainting:** Frequent dizziness, fainting, or feeling lightheaded, often due to dehydration or malnutrition.
- **Cold Sensitivity:** Complaints of feeling cold all the time, even in warm environments, which may be due to low body fat or poor circulation.
- **Disrupted Menstrual Cycle:** Irregular or missed periods in females, often linked to low body weight or hormonal imbalances.
- **Dental Issues:** Erosion of tooth enamel, cavities, or increased tooth sensitivity, often due to repeated vomiting in bulimia nervosa.
- **Calluses on Knuckles:** Calluses or scars on the knuckles (Russell's sign) from inducing vomiting.
- **Swelling:** Swelling around the jaw or cheeks, often due to enlarged salivary glands from purging.

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- **Obsession with Food, Dieting, and Weight:** Constantly talking about dieting, calories, food content, or expressing intense fear of gaining weight.
- **Avoidance of Meals:** Skipping meals, making excuses not to eat, or expressing a sudden disinterest in foods previously enjoyed.
- **Ritualistic Eating Habits:** Cutting food into tiny pieces, eating foods in a specific order, or avoiding entire food groups.
- **Excessive Exercise:** Engaging in compulsive, excessive exercise, often to burn off calories, even when injured or sick.
- **Frequent Trips to the Bathroom:** Leaving for the bathroom immediately after eating, which may indicate purging through vomiting or laxative use.
- **Hoarding or Hiding Food:** Storing food in unusual places, or hiding wrappers, often linked to binge eating behaviors.
- **Social Withdrawal:** Avoiding social situations, particularly those involving food, or showing increased isolation.
- **Use of Diet Pills or Supplements:** Excessive use of weight-loss pills, laxatives, diuretics, or other supplements intended to control weight.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS

- **Body Dissatisfaction:** Persistent negative comments about one's body size, shape, or weight, regardless of actual appearance.
- **Mood Swings:** Increased irritability, depression, anxiety, or emotional instability, often tied to body image concerns or nutritional deficiencies.
- **Perfectionism:** Exhibiting perfectionistic traits, setting unrealistically high standards for oneself, especially regarding appearance or performance.
- **Distorted Body Image:** Perceiving oneself as overweight or "too big" despite being underweight or having a healthy weight.
- **Preoccupation with Appearance:** Spending excessive time in front of the mirror, weighing oneself frequently, or fixating on perceived flaws.
- **Secrecy or Lying About Eating:** Hiding eating habits from others, lying about food intake, or becoming defensive when questioned about food or weight.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNS

- **Changes in Clothing Choices:** Wearing baggy clothes to hide body shape or changes in weight.
- **Increased Interest in Dieting and Fitness Content:** Following or consuming a large amount of media related to dieting, exercise, or body ideals.
- **Changes in School or Work Performance:** Declining performance, difficulty concentrating, or excessive absenteeism due to preoccupation with food, weight, or body image.
- **Engagement in "Pro-Eating Disorder" Communities:** Visiting websites, forums, or social media accounts that promote or glorify eating disorders.



When to Seek HELP

If you notice several of these signs in yourself or someone else, it's important to seek help from a healthcare professional, such as a doctor, therapist, or dietitian, who specializes in eating disorders. Early intervention can lead to better outcomes and is crucial for recovery.