Signs and Symptoms of Eating Disorders

Anorexia / Bulimia

1. Dramatic weight loss in a relatively short period of time.
2. Wearing big or baggy clothes or dressing in layers to hide body shape and / or weight loss.
3. Obsession with weight and complaining of weight problems (even if “average” weight or thin). Anxiety about weight does not diminish with weight loss.
4. Preoccupation with weight, food, calories and dieting, to the extent that it consistently intrudes on conversations and interferes with activities. Repeated weighing.
5. Obsession with continuous exercise - despite weather, fatigue, illness and injury, the need to “burn off” calories taken in.
6. Frequent trips to the bathroom immediately following meals (sometimes accompanied with water running in the bathroom for a long period of time to hide the sound of vomiting).
7. Evidence of self-induced vomiting, such as:
   - Bathroom smells or messes,
   - Returning from the bathroom with bloodshot eyes,
   - Swelling of glands to yield a “chipmunk” facial appearance.
9. Visible binging and / or purging.
10. Use or hiding use of diet pills, laxatives, ipecac syrup (can cause immediate death!) or enemas. (Also look for wrappers, advertisements, or coupons for these items.)
11. Isolation. Fear of eating around and with others. Withdrawal from, or avoidance of, numerous activities because of weight and shape concerns.
12. Unusual food rituals, such as shifting the food around on the plate to look eaten; cutting food into tiny pieces; making sure the fork avoids contact with the lips (using teeth to scrape food off of the fork or spoon); chewing food and spitting it out; dropping food into napkin on lap to later throw away.
13. Stealing food or hiding food in strange places (closets, cabinets, suitcases, under the bed) to avoid eating (Anorexia) or to eat at a later time (Bulimia).
14. Flushing uneaten food down the toilet (can cause sewage problems).
15. Vague or secretive eating patterns.
16. Tooth decay (yellowing, graying, spotted teeth) and receding gums.
18. Evidence of eating huge amounts of food inconsistent with the person’s weight.
19. Extreme concern about appearance as a defining feature of self-esteem, often accompanied by dichotomous, perfectionistic thinking (e.g., either I am “thin and good” or “fat and bad”).
20. Hair loss. Pale or “gray” appearance to the skin.
21. Dizziness, headaches, or disequilibrium not accounted for by other medical problems.
22. Frequent sore throats and / or swollen glands.
23. Low self-esteem. Feeling worthless. Often putting themselves down and complaining of being “too stupid” or “too fat” and saying that they don’t matter. Need for acceptance and approval from others.
24. Complaints of often feeling cold.
25. Low blood pressure.
26. Loss of menstrual cycle.
27. Constipation or incontinence.
28. Bruised or callused knuckles; bloodshot or bleeding in the eyes; light bruising under the eyes and on the cheeks.
29. Loss of sexual desire or promiscuous relations (related to desire for external affirmation of body.)
31. Insomnia and poor sleeping habits.

Compulsive Overeating / Binge Eating Disorder

1. Fear of not being able to control eating, and while eating, not being able to stop.
2. Isolation. Fear of eating around and with others.
3. Avoidance of recreational activities that might expose parts of the body and require physical movement.
4. Chronic dieting on a variety of popular diet plans.
5. Holding the belief that life will be better if they can lose weight.
6. Hiding food in strange places (closets, cabinets, suitcases, under the bed) to eat at a later time.
7. Vague or secretive eating patterns.
8. Self-defeating statements after food consumption. Feelings of disgust, guilt and shame about eating patterns.
9. Blames failure in social and professional community on weight.
10. Holding the belief that food is their only friend or source of comfort.
11. Frequently out of breath after relatively light activities.
12. Excessive sweating and shortness of breath.
13. High blood pressure and / or cholesterol.
14. Leg and joint pain.
15. Weight gain.
16. Decreased mobility due to weight gain.
17. Loss of sexual desire or promiscuous relations.
19. Insomnia and poor sleeping habits.

Adapted from EDAP (Eating Disorder Awareness and Prevention--www.edap.org) Handouts and the Something Fishy Website on Eating Disorders (www.something-fishy.org).