



Tips for a Healthy Family Eating Disorders in Children

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Eating disorders may occur among all ages and genders. The occurrence rates for girls are much higher than for boys. According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the United States has as many as 1 million males and 10 million females with eating disorders. The most common age range is 14-17. There are a number of types of eating disorders,

with the most commonly diagnosed being Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa.

Anorexia Nervosa is a disorder where the person has an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat. Because of this fear, individuals with Anorexia Nervosa exhibit extreme food restriction (starvation), excessive exercise, vomiting, and/or the misuse of laxatives or diuretics. Individuals with anorexia nervosa maintain a body weight that is below a normal level for age and height and they have a significant and skewed perception of their body shape or size. According to the [DSM-IV](#) (pp 539-545), there are two types of Anorexia Nervosa: Restricting type and Binge-Eating/Purging type. The Restricting type presents through dieting, fasting, or excessive exercise but not through regular binge eating or purging. The Binge-eating/Purging type presents through regular binge eating (excessive food consumption in a short amount of time) and/or purging. Purging can occur through self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives or diuretics. Some individuals in this type do not binge eat but will regularly purge after eating small amounts of food. Besides rapid weight loss, other side effects include girls no longer having their periods, slowing of metabolism, an orange tint on the face or hands, organ failure and anemia. If you suspect your child is anorexic, seek medical attention as soon as possible. Early and fast medical attention can help improve the outcome.

Bulimia Nervosa is similar to Anorexia Nervosa where an individual has a fear of gaining weight or becoming fat and has a significant and skewed perception of one's body shape or size. Individuals with Bulimia Nervosa may binge eat and then use a recurrent method to purge from the binge (vomiting, laxatives, diuretics, enemas). Although binges vary, typically sweet or high caloric foods are consumed and are described as a feeling of loss of control. Individuals with Bulimia Nervosa maintain a body weight within the normal weight level for age and height but may be slightly underweight or overweight. Females tend to have regular periods. According to the [DSM-IV](#) (pp. 545-550), there are two types of Bulimia Nervosa: Purging type and Nonpurging type. The Purging type presents through engaging in regular vomiting, or the misuse of diuretics. The Nonpurging type presents through fasting or excessive exercise but not regularly vomiting or misusing laxatives or diuretics. Side effects could be bags under eyes, constant sore throat, dizziness, erosion of teeth enamel, dehydration, and irregular heartbeats. As with any eating disorder, if you suspect you child is bulimic seek medical attention as soon as possible.



Although eating disorders can be treated, they may be hard to diagnose and there may be a lot of resistance from your child to receive care. Many individuals keep their eating disorders secret or deny needing help. Your child may also share symptoms with other mental health disorders, which may delay a diagnosis. Treatment for an eating disorder involves a team of professionals that often include physicians, mental health professionals, and nutritionists. Other professionals involved in supporting overall wellness activities such as massage or yoga, can also be beneficial to recovering from an eating disorder. Family members and other natural supports are also important in the treatment of eating disorders. Parents can help their child by modeling a healthy body image, modeling a healthy diet and eating nutritious meals.

The [National Eating Disorders Association](#) has a very extensive toolkit for parents to assist with diagnosis and recovery. There are also some good books available. [Help Your Teenage Beat an Eating Disorder](#), [What's Eating You](#), and [Why Can't You Just Eat?](#)

For more information, check out our website at <http://www.uwyo.edu/wind/f2f> or follow us on Twitter [@WYF2F](https://twitter.com/WYF2F).

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