

Anorexia and bulimia

What is anorexia? People who suffer from anorexia nervosa want to be slimmer, have an extreme fear of getting fat or putting on any weight and worry excessively about their body image. That is why they display abnormal behavior towards food and body weight, size and shape. All of this is often associated with a distorted view of their own appearance. Young women with obsessive personality traits are particularly vulnerable to anorexia.

What is bulimia?

Bulimia is a disease that seems to be the opposite of anorexia. It is characterized by uncontrollable episodes of eating excessive amounts of food (bingeing) in a short period of time. The person then feels guilty and tries to "compensate" through self-induced vomiting or abuse of laxatives and diuretics. Half of patients with anorexia nervosa engage in bulimic behavior at some stage of their illness.

Why does it happen?

The media (television, magazines) and advertisements project images of extremely thin persons as standards of beauty and success. Some people are highly sensitive to this message and reject their own bodies because they do not fit this image of supposed perfection.

What are the symptoms?

- Slimming down with excessive weight loss, malnutrition and muscular atrophy, more obvious in men.
- Menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation.
- Abnormal attitude towards and rejection of food.

- Self-induced vomiting.
- Abuse of laxatives and diuretics.
- Compulsive exercise.
- Sadness, irritability, sudden changes in mood, problems with family and at school.
- Denial of the disease.
- In the most extreme cases, it can cause serious health problems.



Treatment of anorexia and bulimia

Both diseases require individual and family therapy. Treatment must be provided by professionals. It is important to get help as soon as possible.

Prevention tips for parents

- Learn how to identify and express feelings in order to build self-esteem.
- Accept that no one is perfect and promote a healthy body image.
- Provide appropriate guidance to restore healthy eating habits (set a schedule for meals, stress the importance of eating everything in moderation, avoid restrictive diets without proper medical advice, etc.).
- Encourage critical thinking about cultural stereotypes (especially with regards to advertising and fashion).

For family support: Association against anorexia and bulimia (Asociación contra la Anorexia y la Bulimia-ACAB) www.acab.org. Telephone: 934549275