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Understanding and Coping with Learning Disorders

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(Texas Child Health Through Telemedicine)



Overview

- Eating disorders are serious conditions related to persistent eating behaviors that negatively impact health, emotions and ability to function in important areas of life.
- Most eating disorders involve focusing too much on weight, body shape and food, leading to dangerous eating behaviors. These behaviors can significantly impact body's ability to get appropriate nutrition. Eating disorders can harm the heart, digestive system, bones, and teeth and mouth, and lead to other diseases.
- Eating disorders often develop in the teen and young adult years, although they can develop at other ages. With treatment, individual can return to healthier eating habits and sometimes reverse serious complications caused by the eating disorder.



Types and Symptoms

- Symptoms vary, depending on the type of eating disorder. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder are the most common eating disorders.
- **Anorexia nervosa** (anorexia) is a potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by an abnormally low body weight, intense fear of gaining weight, and a distorted perception of weight or shape.
- **Bulimia nervosa** (bulimia) — is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder. Bulimia characterized by episodes of bingeing and purging that involve feeling a lack of control over your eating. Many people with bulimia also restrict their eating during the day, which often leads to more binge eating and purging.
- **Binge-eating disorder** characterized by regularly eating too much food (binge) and feeling a lack of control over your eating. A person may eat quickly or eat more food than intended, even when not hungry, and may continue eating even long after feeling uncomfortably full.



Causes and Risk Factors

- The exact cause of eating disorders is unknown. As with other mental illnesses, there may be many causes, such as: **genetics/biology and psychological and emotional health.**
- Teenage girls and young women are more likely than teenage boys and young men to have anorexia or bulimia, but males can have eating disorders, too. Although eating disorders can occur across a broad age range, they often develop in the teens and early 20s.
- Certain factors may increase the risk of developing an eating disorder, including: **family history, other mental health disorders, dieting and starvation, and stress.**



Complications and Prevention

- Eating disorders cause a wide variety of complications, some of them life-threatening. The more severe or long lasting the eating disorder, the more likely individuals are to experience serious complications, such as: serious health problems, depression and anxiety, suicidal thoughts or behavior, problems with growth and development, social and relationship problems, substance use disorders, work and school issues, death.
- Although there is no sure way to prevent eating disorders, here are some strategies to help your child develop healthy-eating behaviors: **avoid dieting around your child, talk to your child, cultivate and reinforce a healthy body image, enlist the help of your child's doctor.**
- If you notice a family member or friend who seems to show signs of an eating disorder, consider talking to that person about your concern for his or her well-being. Although you may not be able to prevent an eating disorder from developing, reaching out with compassion may encourage the person to seek treatment.



Diagnosis

- Eating disorders are diagnosed based on signs, symptoms and eating habits. If a doctor suspects an eating disorder, he or she will likely perform an exam and request tests to help pinpoint a diagnosis. A person may see both primary care provider and a mental health professional for a diagnosis.
- Assessments and tests generally include: physical exam, psychological evaluation, and other studies.



Treatment

- Treatment of an eating disorder generally includes a team approach. The team typically includes primary care providers, mental health professionals and dietitians — all with experience in eating disorders.
- Treatment depends on specific type of eating disorder. But in general, it typically includes nutrition education, psychotherapy and medication. If person's life is at risk, immediate hospitalization maybe required.
- **Healthy eating:** No matter what of the weight, the members of the team can work with the individual to design a plan to help him or her achieve healthy eating habits.
- **Medications:** Medication cannot cure an eating disorder. However, certain medications may help you control urges to binge or purge or to manage excessive preoccupations with food and diet.



Treatment

- **Psychotherapy:** Psychotherapy, also called talk therapy, can help you learn how to replace unhealthy habits with healthy ones. This may include:
Family-based therapy (FBT) is an evidence-based treatment for children and teenagers with eating disorders. The family is involved in making sure that the child or other family member follows healthy-eating patterns and maintains a healthy weight. And **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** is commonly used in eating disorder treatment, especially for bulimia and binge-eating disorder. Individual learns how to monitor and improve eating habits and moods, develop problem-solving skills, and explore healthy ways to cope with stressful situations.
- **Hospitalization:** If a person has serious health problems, such as anorexia that has resulted in severe malnutrition, doctor may recommend hospitalization. Some clinics specialize in treating people with eating disorders. Some may offer day programs, rather than full hospitalization. Specialized eating disorder programs may offer more intensive treatment over longer periods of time.



Holistic Methods

- Some complementary treatments and approaches may help reduce stress and anxiety, promote relaxation, and increase a sense of well-being in people with eating disorders. Examples include: acupuncture, massage, yoga, and meditation.
- Dietary supplements
- Support from family and friends



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Questions