



Eating Disorders

These are disturbances in eating resulting from psychological issues and seriously affecting the physical. There are three types of disorders:

1. **Anorexia Nervosa:** deliberate and sustained weight loss driven by a fear of distorted body image. Symptoms include the following:
 - an abnormally low body weight;
 - the absence of three consecutive menstrual cycles known as amenorrhea;
 - an intense fear of gaining weight and preoccupation with body weight.

People with anorexia nervosa tend to be overly perfectionist, driven to succeed but with unattainable standards of performance. When they fail, they look to aspects of their life that they can control such as food and weight. Most sufferers of anorexia are adolescents with a prevalence of 1 in 100, 000. 85-95% are females and 5% die.

2. **Bulimia Nervosa:** cyclical and recurring pattern of uncontrolled bursts of overeating (known as binge eating) followed by guilt and behaviour such as over exercising and purging to make up for the extreme intake of calories. Symptoms include:
 - Abnormal bowel functioning;
 - Dehydration;
 - Fatigue;
 - Amenorrhea;
 - Constant dieting;
 - Eating to the point of discomfort or pain;
 - Eating abnormal amounts of food;
 - Exercising for hours on end;
 - Misuse of laxatives;
 - Being preoccupied with body image and weight;
 - Going to the bathroom often during or straight after meals.

Binge eating leads to feelings of shame, guilt and failure. People with bulimia compensate for the binge and their feelings by purging the food through laxatives or vomiting. This leads to feelings of hunger and the cycle starts again. 95% of all sufferers are females.

3. Binge eating disorder: involves the consumption of very large amounts of food in a short period of time. Binge eaters tend to have higher levels of depression, alcohol problems and impulsive behaviour. They also have more physical problems. Symptoms of binge eating include:

- Eating large amounts of food rapidly
- Eating to the point of discomfort or pain
- Feeling that eating behaviour is out of control
- Eating alone
- Hoarding food

People with binge eating disorder often feel guilty and ashamed of their uncontrollable eating habits but do not try to compensate in the way that individuals with bulimia nervosa do. Binge eating is most common in adults between the ages of 45 and 55 although individuals at any age can develop this disorder. Around 25% of the general population suffer from this disorder.

Famous people with eating disorders:

- Diana - Princess of Wales
- Elton John (singer)
- Audrey Hepburn (actress)
- Franz Kafka (poet and writer)
- Victoria Beckham (member of the Spice Girls)

Treatment: A combination of psychosocial interventions and medication are used to help individuals become in control of their conditions.

Medical help: Although eating disorders are a psychiatric condition, the body is greatly affected and therefore physical interventions by medical professionals are an integral part of treatment.

Psychotherapy: It is usually not carried out until the patient has regained some weight and is considered to be safe enough to undergo psychotherapeutic interventions.

Cognitive behavioural therapy: It targets thought and behaviours and aims to modify them. It is especially beneficial in cases of bulimia nervosa.

Family therapy: It has been found to be particularly effective as it deals with family issues and allows all members to be involved in treatment.