



Recognizing that you may have unhealthy eating habits and unrealistic thoughts about food is the first step to getting better.

Food is everywhere: the cafeteria, the mall, at parties, and in the fridge. But many teens worry about food, their weight, and eating habits. How concerned are you?

Do you:

- Divide foods into “good” or “bad”?
- Feel guilty, upset, or nervous when you eat certain foods?
- Diet constantly, skip meals, or wait a long time between meals?
- Compare your eating habits to your friends?
- Worry that you can’t control how much you eat?
- Hate your stomach, thighs, or other body parts?
- Worry about what people think of your looks?
- Compare your looks to models, actors, or athletes and end up feeling bad?
- “Work-off” certain foods after you eat them?

The scoop on eating

- Your body is changing. It’s important to eat the right amount of nutritious food to feel good and energetic.
- It is not uncommon for both girls and guys to be concerned with weight and food, but don’t let the scale run your life. The numbers on the scale don’t reflect your self-worth.
- TV and magazines have very narrow ideas of what people should look like. Don’t believe that this is how you should look.
- How you feel can affect how you eat. For example, some people may not eat if they feel stressed out. Others may eat when they are bored or depressed. This is called “emotional eating.”
- Emotional eating can lead to physical and emotional problems later on.

The truth about diets

- Diets are rarely successful in the long run and can actually be harmful.
- Many diets involve avoiding food that your body needs. Cutting out all carbs (carbohydrates) or all fat is dangerous.
- If you are a vegetarian, it is important to make sure that you get enough protein and other nutrients.
- Skipping meals is not a healthy or effective way to lose weight. You’ll feel even hungrier later, and may overeat.
- Cutting calories and over-exercising can leave your body “drained.” You can end up very tired and at risk for injuries.

- Vitamins and supplements can’t replace food. Taking supplements and vitamins does not protect you from malnutrition.

What are eating disorders?

Some people become so concerned about food and eating habits that it begins to take over their lives. They may develop unhealthy eating habits and have unrealistic thoughts about food. This can lead to dangerous eating disorders. The other side of this page has brief descriptions of some eating disorders.

Who gets eating disorders and why treat them?

- Most people who get eating disorders are women and girls; however, eating disorders can also affect men and boys. Teens involved in sports, like wrestling, dance, and gymnastics are especially at risk.
- It is not known what causes eating disorders, but emotional problems, genetics, life experiences (such as the death of a loved one), and peer and family pressure may all play a part.
- Some people look at thin models and actors as the “ideal” and feel pressure to conform.
- Eating disorders rarely go away by themselves. The sooner someone gets treatment for an eating disorder, the better. If left untreated, they can cause serious physical and emotional problems.

TYPES OF EATING DISORDERS

WHAT IS IT?

SOME COMMON SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Anorexia Nervosa

A person doesn't eat enough because of a strong fear of becoming fat.

- skipping meals and/or eating very little
- believing one is fat in spite of being thin
- wearing lots of baggy clothes to hide weight loss
- feeling cold all the time

Bulimia Nervosa

A person eats a large amount of food (binges) and then gets rid of it (purges). People with bulimia fear weight gain, but they usually stay at a normal weight or are slightly overweight.

- eating a large amount of food in a short period of time, generally less than 2 hours
- purposely making yourself vomit, using laxatives frequently, or exercising excessively
- having feelings of shame, guilt, and being out of control

Binge Eating

A person eats a large amount of food in a short period of time without purging.

- eating a large amount of food in a short period of time, generally less than 2 hours
- having feelings of shame, guilt, and being out of control
- gaining weight
- eating when depressed, down, or stressed

Helping yourself

- If you have any of the signs and symptoms mentioned above, talk to an adult you trust—like your doctor or nurse practitioner—about getting help.
- It's okay to feel guilty about your problems with food and to be scared about treatment. A lot of people have the same feelings.
- Recognizing that you may have unhealthy eating habits and unrealistic thoughts about food is the first step to getting better.

Helping a friend

- Learn about eating disorders.
- Let them know you care and you want to help.
- Talk to your parents or a trusted adult about your concerns.
- Don't nag your friend about her/his eating or talk about weight (yours and theirs).

- Encourage your friend to get professional help.
- Be prepared. They may deny the problem, get angry, or refuse help.
- Remember that you can only do so much. Reaching out now may help them get treatment in the future.

Resources

Check out Kaiser Permanente's eating disorder tip sheets: *Anorexia Nervosa*, *Bulimia Nervosa*, and *Binge Eating*. Or visit kp.org/nutrition for more information.

Getting help at Kaiser Permanente

Teens can make their own appointments to see a doctor, nurse, or counselor. Some KP facilities have a clinic especially for teens.

Books

- *Hunger Pains*, Mary Pipher, PhD. Random House, Inc., New York, New York Rev. ed. 1997.

- *When Girls Feel Fat: Helping Girls Through Adolescence*, S. Freidman, Harper-Collins.
- *Surviving an Eating Disorder: Strategies for Family and Friends*, M. Siegel & J. Brisman, Harper-Collins, 1997.
- *When Your Child has an Eating Disorder*, A. Natenshon, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Web sites

- Kaiser Permanente: kp.org
- Something Fishy: something-fishy.org
- Food and Nutrition Information Center, sponsored by the USDA [nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000017.html#eatdis](http://usda.gov/fnic/etext/000017.html#eatdis)
- About-face (body image and media) about-face.org
- Eating Disorders Awareness & Prevention (EDAP) www.edap.org
- If you are being hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or being pressured to have sex, it can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or connect to loveisrespect.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.