

Anorexia nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss. Eating disorder experts have found that prompt intensive treatment significantly improves the chances of recovery.

Warning Signs & Symptoms

- Dramatic weight loss and intense fear of weight gain or being "fat." Makes frequent comments about feeling "fat" or overweight despite weight loss. Has a distorted view of body weight or shape, an undue influence of weight or shape on self-evaluation, and/or a denial of the seriousness of low body weight.
- Feeling cold all the time; dresses in layers to hide weight loss or stay warm.
- Is preoccupied with food, calories, fat grams, and dieting. Refuses to eat certain foods, progressing to restrictions against whole categories of food (e.g., no carbohydrates, etc.)
- Complains of constipation, abdominal pain, cold intolerance, and lethargy.
- Denies feeling hungry.
- Develops food rituals (e.g., eating foods in certain orders, excessive chewing, etc.) and/or consistently makes excuses to avoid mealtimes or situations involving food.
- Maintains an excessive, rigid exercise regimen – despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury.
- Withdraws from usual friends and activities and becomes more isolated, withdrawn, and secretive.
- Post-puberty female loses menstrual period.
- Has strong need for control.
- Experiences thinning of hair on head, dry and brittle hair, dental problems (such as enamel erosion, cavities, and tooth sensitivity), dry skin, sleep problems, and dizziness/fainting.

Health Consequences

Anorexia nervosa involves self-starvation. Consequently, the body is denied essential nutrients that it needs to function normally. The body is forced to slow down all of its processes to conserve energy. This can result in serious health consequences, which may include:

- Abnormally slow heart rate and low blood pressure. The risk for heart failure rises as heart rate and blood pressure levels continue to lower.
- Slowed digestion, constipation, stomach pain
- Reduction of bone density, which results in dry, brittle bones and an increased risk of osteoporosis



Anorexia is the third most common chronic disease among young people, after asthma and type 1 diabetes.

At any given point in time between 0.3-0.4% of young women and 0.1% of young men will suffer from anorexia nervosa.

A person does not need to be emaciated or underweight to have anorexia nervosa.

Adapted from:
nationaleatingdisorders.org

For additional information and resources on anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders please refer to WSR "Eating Disorder Resources" fact sheet.