

Disordered Eating: Warning Signs & When to Seek Treatment

According to a recent poll and article by SELF magazine, approximately 65% of American women are 'disordered eaters.' Although many of them may not meet the criteria for specific eating disorders like anorexia or bulimia, the habits that go along with disordered eating have the same potential to wreck physical and emotional health. So what is disordered eating and how do you know when to seek treatment?

Disordered eating is all about thinking in extremes (e.g., never eating after 6 p.m. or only eating non-fat foods). What follows is a list of habits that can constitute disordered eating. Review the list and ask yourself whether these behaviors negatively affect your health (physical or emotional) or interfere with your daily functioning:

- ❖ Having a very strong fear of gaining 5 pounds
- ❖ Following strict food rules
- ❖ Dieting for more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of your life
- ❖ Using diet pills or laxatives
- ❖ Fasting or using juice cleanses to lose weight
- ❖ Over-exercising
- ❖ Cutting entire food groups from your diet (except for religious reasons)
- ❖ Eating the same "safe" foods every day
- ❖ Extreme calorie restriction
- ❖ Thinking about food more than 50% of the time
- ❖ Obsessive calorie counting
- ❖ Intentionally skipping meals to lose weight
- ❖ Bingeing (eating large quantities of food very quickly) or vomiting
- ❖ Smoking for weight loss
- ❖ Hiding food or lying about how much you've eaten
- ❖ Weighing yourself daily
- ❖ Consistently overeating when you are not hungry
- ❖ Eating a lot of no- or low-calorie foods
- ❖ Refusing to see a doctor despite concerns about your eating or weight
- ❖ Considering foods to be good or bad
- ❖ Visiting pro-anorexia or pro-bulimia websites
- ❖ Adopting a vegetarian diet solely for weight loss

If you identified with any of the behaviors listed above and feel that they are interfering with your life, it's time to seek treatment. A qualified counselor or therapist can help you address these behaviors and the thoughts behind them, and come up with a more moderate approach to seeing yourself and managing your weight. Even though most of these behaviors don't constitute a diagnosable disorder per se, they are often the precursors to more serious eating disorders. Remember that long-term weight management is about ***lifestyle change***, which includes a ***change in thinking*** and a ***change in behavior***. Don't let extreme thinking patterns sabotage your efforts any longer. Take control of your thoughts and start living your life!

Adapted from a SELF Magazine article entitled "Disordered Eating: The Disorder Next Door" by Tula Karras