

Signs of an Eating Disorder

The signs listed below are a compilation of behavioral, physical, and psychological signs that, when grouped together, are characteristic of individuals affected by an eating disorder. It is important to keep in mind that some of the signs on this list are fairly normative (e.g., uses food to numb distressing emotions) as independent issues and are experienced by many people who do not have eating disorders. However, the combination of these more normative behaviors with other severe, non-normative behaviors (e.g., vomits after eating) likely indicates an eating disorder. This list should not be used exclusively to diagnose an eating disorder, nor should it be used as a replacement for professional treatment. If you suspect that you or a loved one is affected by an eating disorder, please seek professional treatment immediately. *Recovery is possible!*

Behavioral Signs

- Counts/restricts calories
- Exercises excessively
- Vomits after eating
- Uses laxatives, diuretics, caffeine pills, or other weight-loss meds
- Hides or hoards food
- Uses bathroom right after eating
- Weighs self several times a day
- Cooks/bakes for others but refuses to eat these foods
- Often has excuses for not eating
- Preoccupied with checking body in mirror
- Significant amount of time spent trying on and changing clothes
- Follows rigid exercise routine
- Wears baggy clothing
- Refuses to eat with others, including own family
- Avoids social situations involving food
- Always on a diet
- Limits or cuts out certain food groups (e.g., carbs, dairy)
- Binges, eats large amount of food in a short period of time
- Consumes a full day's worth of calories/nutrition in one sitting
- Chews food then spits it out without swallowing
- Encouraged by others to eat more or less food

Physical Signs

- Weighs less than 85% of healthy body weight
- Bones noticeably visible
- Loss of menstrual cycle
- Brittle hair and nails
- Hair loss
- Dry skin and lips
- Consistently cold hands and feet, even in warm temperatures
- Swollen cheeks along jaw bone
- Scars on index finger
- Discolored, grey front teeth
- Rapid fluctuations in weight
- Frequent dizzy spells
- Irregular heartbeat
- Dehydrated
- Unbalanced electrolytes
- Low blood pressure
- Low bone density
- Frequent constipation and/or bowel problems
- Swollen legs and feet
- Unexplained stomach pains
- Sore throat, persistent cough
- Persistent acid reflux
- Unexplained acne

Psychological Signs

- Preoccupied with food, weight, dieting, calories, thinness, body size, and/or specific body parts
- Fears gaining weight or becoming "fat"
- Constantly criticizes own body
- Obsessed with being healthy and eating health foods
- Mood dependent on weight
- Feels out of control when eating
- Feels guilty, ashamed, angry, and/or embarrassed after eating
- Scared to eat certain foods
- Eats when not hungry
- Eats until uncomfortably full
- Uses food to numb distressing emotions
- Labels foods as "good" and "bad"
- Perfectionistic
- Strives to please others, even at the expense of own needs/wants
- Engages in "black-and-white" thinking
- Prone to depression, anxiety, and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder