

ED Warning Signs & Symptoms



Since early detection of an eating disorder is a predictor of sustained recovery, it is important to know ED warning signs and symptoms. If you notice several of the symptoms listed below, please seek an evaluation with a professional trained in treating eating disorders.

An eating disorder professional can provide you with further information regarding the diagnosis of an eating disorder and best next steps. Sharing your thoughts, concerns, and feelings with someone who can listen



compassionately while suspending judgment may be helpful, comforting, and motivating. Please note that people struggling with an eating disorder may not experience some or all of these symptoms. This list is intended to serve as an overview of possible ED warning signs and symptoms.

Content warning: Specific mention of eating disorder behaviors are listed below.

Anorexia Nervosa

Physical Symptoms:

- Noticeable weight loss which is not caused by a known physical illness
- Becomes cold easily, especially the extremities
- Broken blood vessels in the eyes or face
- Swollen salivary glands (“puffy cheeks”)
- Difficulty concentrating

- Problems with short-term memory
- Dizziness
- Evidence of vomiting, laxative abuse, diet pills, or diuretics to control weight
- Fainting
- Fatigue, weakness
- Muscle weakness and cramping, especially in the legs
- Pale complexion
- Yellow-orange skin
- Lanugo (fine, soft hair) on body
- Hands and feet may appear bluish

Behavioral, Psychological, and Emotional Symptoms:

- Frequently checking weight on a scale
- Distorted perception of body size
- Cooking for others
- Obsession with food, calories, and recipes
- Depression, irritability, and mood swings
- Difficulty eating in public or refusal to eat in public
- Excessive exercise
- Exercising even when injured or ill
- Self-worth is determined by what is or is not eaten as well as by the number on the scale
- Frequent, multiple excuses for not eating meals
- Guilt, shame, or feeling weak about eating
- Isolating from friends, family, and social activities
- Highly self-critical
- Keeping meticulous track of calories consumed
- Labels foods as “good” or “bad”
- Low self-esteem
- Noticeable discomfort around food
- Odd behaviors with food (e.g., mixing foods that do not typically go together, taking small bites, cutting food into tiny pieces, playing with food to avoid eating it)
- Rigid food rules and behaviors
- Restricting food choices to low calorie or diet foods
- Perfectionistic attitude
- Secretive about eating patterns
- Takes exquisite care of others
- Chewing and spitting food
- Wearing baggy clothes to hide weight loss

Bulimia Nervosa

Physical Symptoms:

- Abrasions on back of hands and knuckles (also called Russell's sign)
- Broken blood vessels in the eyes or face
- Dental decay and/or tooth discoloration
- Problems with short term memory
- Difficult concentrating
- Enlarged salivary or parotid glands
- Fatigue, lethargy
- Sore throat and/or stomach pain
- Muscle weakness and cramping
- Weight fluctuations

Behavioral, Psychological, and Emotional Symptoms:

- Vomiting
- Avoiding restaurants, planned meals
- Binge eating
- Chewing and spitting food
- Fasting (usually after a binge)
- Fear of not being able to stop eating when full
- Harsh, excessive exercise regimens
- Exercising even when injured or ill
- Labels food as "good" and "bad"
- Laxative, diet pill, or diuretic misuse
- Mood swings, irritability, depression
- Needing approval from others
- Secretive eating and evidence of food missing
- Self-worth determined by weight
- Self-deprecating thoughts following eating experience
- Severe self-criticism
- Co-occurring substance use is common
- Visiting the bathroom after eating

Binge Eating Disorder

Physical Symptoms:

- Dry skin

- Brittle hair
- May feel uncomfortably full after bingeing
- Bloating
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea
- Low energy, fatigue
- Acid reflux

Behavioral, Psychological, and Emotional Symptoms:

- Attempting many types of diets
- Binge eating
- Depression
- Minimally eating in public
- Fear of not being able to stop eating when full
- Feeling tormented by eating habits
- Feelings of self-worth are based on weight
- Isolating from friends, family, social activities, and obligations
- Self-deprecating thoughts following binges
- Shame and guilt following binges, also present continuously in regards to weight
- Sleep deprivation
- Hyperfocusing on weight
- Withdrawing from activities due to embarrassment about weight

Other Specified Feeding and Eating Disorders (OSFED)

Any of the symptoms of anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder can be found in individuals with OSFED. Some of these overlapping symptoms include but are not limited to:

Physical Symptoms:

- Weight loss, gain, or fluctuations
- Dizziness
- Swollen glands
- Easily cold

Behavioral, Psychological, and Emotional Symptoms:

- Preoccupation with food, eating, and body weight/shape
- Anxiety, irritability, and depression
- Label foods as “good” or “bad”
- Poor body image
- Calorie counting
- Overexercising

- Restricting food intake
- Bingeing
- Purging
- Secretive eating
- Increased interest in cooking, especially for others

Avoidant / Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)

One key feature of ARFID is the absence of body image disturbance.

Physical Symptoms:

- Abnormal lab work
- Constipation
- Dry skin
- Easily and frequently cold
- Gastrointestinal complaints
- Lanugo (fine, soft hair) on body
- Mottled skin on legs, hands, and feet
- Significant weight loss
- Significant nutritional deficiency
- Swelling in legs or feet
- Tired and lethargic
- Trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating

Behavioral, Psychological, and Emotional Symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fear of choking or vomiting
- Irritability
- May refuse certain textures
- Willing to eat a narrow selection of foods
- Socially isolated