

ANOREXIA NERVOSA

What is it?

Anorexia nervosa is when a person refuses to eat in order to deliberately lose weight whether the weight loss is necessary or not. Usually a distorted body image is present; the individual thinks they are fat even if they are emaciated. Sometimes a disorder known as bulimia is also present in which vomiting is induced to rid the body of any food that is eaten.

The causes of anorexia are variable but may include past sexual or emotional abuse, social status accorded to the very thin in the U.S. today, various phobias, depression and personality disorders. Workaholics, overachievers and perfectionists are more at risk to develop anorexia nervosa. Someone in a profession where body type and/or athletic performance is important will be more likely to develop anorexia, such as cheerleaders, models, ballet dancers and high performance athletes. Severe forms of anorexia nervosa can be life-threatening.

If untreated, severe problems can occur such as disability, heartbeat irregularities, osteoporosis, anemia, electrolyte disturbances or even death due to medical problems or suicide.

Signs and symptoms:

- * Weight loss greater than fifteen percent of body weight in absence of other medical causes.
- * Intense anxiety over gaining weight.
- * Feeling cold.
- * High energy level in spite of inadequate food intake.
- * Loss of appetite.
- * Refusal to admit being too thin.
- * Secretive eating habits.
- * Menstrual periods cease.
- * Nutritional deficiencies, osteoporosis.

Treatment:

- * The disorder is very treatable if the patient admits to the problem and wants help.
- * Behavior-modification therapy monitored by a professional will be necessary. Therapy may last several years.
- * Healthy-eating patterns must be relearned.
- * Avoid over-exercising.
- * Vitamin and mineral supplements will probably be prescribed.

Call the office or 911 if you or someone you know has anorexia and experiences rapid or irregular heartbeat, chest pain or loss of consciousness! Consider this an emergency.