

## **PARENT EDUCATION EATING DISORDERS**

The *thin obsession* of our advertising and popular culture encourages eating disorders in our most vulnerable girls. 50% of teenage girls are on a diet. Anorexia and bulimia are fairly common. 2% of teens have anorexia. 10% of college students have bulimia. 10 to 20% of our general population has an eating disorder.

One in seven adolescents with an eating disorder is a boy! Boys usually get involved because of sports, especially weight conscious sports such as wrestling. Adolescent girls and boys are very vulnerable to coaches, dance instructors and gymnastics coaches who often pressure them to lower their weight and who focus on body appearance. This is the shadow side of our wonderful athletic programs.

An established eating disorder is *life threatening*. Eating disorders are *Addictive Disorders*. The longer it goes on, the more entrenched and difficult to treat it becomes.

### ***EARLY INTERVENTION IS CRUCIAL!***

Anorexia and bulimia can be conquered. The earlier you intervene, the better the chances for effective treatment. Effective treatment always involves a team approach (doctors, therapists and nutritionists). Special skills and training are needed to work with eating disorders.

### ***REMEMBER***

- Eating disorders are *Addictive Disorders*
- *Early intervention* (counseling and assessment) is the key
- Teens with eating disorders are *secretive* about what they are doing and do not want help.
- Watch your adolescent for signs of anorexia or bulimia. If you see symptoms, get help.

***ANY ADOLESCENT WHO IS ON A STRICT DIET SHOULD BE IN COUNSELING.***

### ***SYMPTOMS OF EATING DISORDERS***

- Preoccupation with food, calories and dieting
- Social withdrawal
- Secretiveness coupled with denial of a problem
- Obsession with control
- Obsessive exercising
- Extreme moodiness and irritability
- Use of laxatives, diet pills, diuretics, or emetics (often in secret)

### ***SYMPTOMS OF ANOREXIA***

- Intense fear of weight gain
- Deliberate self-starvation coupled with denial of hunger
- Perfectionism, inflexibility
- Low body weight (often concealed by heavy clothing)
- Distorted body image, (teen believes she is “fat” when she is underweight)
- Unusual eating habits
- Loss of menstrual periods

### ***SYMPTOMS OF BULIMIA***

- Bingeing on food (often in secret)
- Purging after eating (teen goes to the bathroom to vomit in secret)
- Abrasions on back of the hands (from teeth)
- Hoarding food (often in secret)
- Please note: Girls with bulimia often have normal or fluctuating body weight.

### ***PREVENTION; WHAT PARENTS CAN DO***

- *Do not encourage dieting.*
- Talking to your teen may not be effective (because of the extreme secretiveness and denial characteristic of eating disorders).
- *Do not deny symptoms* of an eating disorder, if you see them in your teen.
- Take your teen for an assessment to a professional who *specializes* in working with adolescents and eating disorders. Special skills and training are needed to recognize eating disorders and to treat them.

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## **EATING DISORDERS**

### ***HOW TO PROTECT YOUR DAUGHTER'S MENTAL HEALTH***

Eating Disorders are common in American teenagers. The groundwork for an eating disorder is laid in childhood and pre-teen years. Cultural factors, which are very powerful, are at work. Family factors can also be important.

#### **PREVENTION; WHAT PARENTS CAN DO**

- No dieting or diet talk in the family during crucial pre-teen and teen years
- Eat three meals a day regularly, especially breakfast. No skipping of breakfast. Breakfast is needed to jump-start the metabolism at the beginning of the day. Eating disorders typically start with skipping breakfast.
- Healthy balanced meals are good, so long as there is not a lot of verbal discussion of what to eat and what not to eat.
- Provide healthy snacks, (trail mix, carrots, fruit, cheese sticks, yogurt, milk, juice), for your children. Don't provide as much junk food. Do not discuss this much, just provide certain types of food.
- Any teen or pre-teen who places herself on a diet should be evaluated by a counselor or her Doctor.
- Limit your daughter's exposure to teen glamour magazines that glorify the "perfect body."
- If your daughter is athletic, especially in a sport which emphasizes weight control or body appearance – such as ballet or gymnastics – be aware of what the coaches are saying to your daughter.
- Be alert for perfectionism in all its guises: In parents – overworked, over-busy, over-scheduled, workaholic, high-achievers. In kids – over-scheduled, high expectations in grades, athletics and social life. Perfectionism can set the stage for eating disorders.

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