What is Anorexia Nervosa?

Anorexia nervosa, or simply anorexia, is an eating disorder in which victims participate in self-starvation and calorie restriction and maintain an abnormally low body weight. Those who suffer from the disorder have an intense fear of food and weight gain, and they often don’t see themselves as being unnaturally thin. Most common in women, anorexia provides its victims with a way to control their surroundings, manage anxiety, cope with or suppress emotions or simply to self-destruct. Victims obsess about food and are perpetually concerned about their body weight and size. Because anorexic behavior is similar to drug addiction it must be treated below the surface at the emotional level in order to change the physical condition.

Physical Effects

When a man or woman suffers from anorexia, the physical repercussions can be severe, often deadly. Because the body cannot perform normal functions it begins to shut down its organs and systems. Hormones, brain chemistry, nerves, blood pressure, skin, hair, bone density, digestion—all are affected by the body’s starved condition. Women who suffer from anorexia may cease to have their periods and risk losing the ability to have children. For these reasons, as well as general emotional and mental wellness, it’s important that those who suffer from the behavior get help.

Common Symptoms

- Restricting calorie intake to stay below a healthy body weight
- Eating only specific foods they view as “safe”
- Binging and purging (bulimia)
- Excessive laxative use
- Compulsive exercise and intense fear of missing a workout
- Loss of menstrual cycles
- Inability to eat in front of others or at restaurants
- Isolation and depression; loss of social interest
- Obsessive thinking and talking about food and weight
- Ritualistic behaviors involving meal times and quantities
- Constant body or weight checking
- Chewing and spitting large quantities of food
- Overhydrating
- Extreme use of diet pills or supplements

Anorexia Treatment

At Monarch Cove our dedicated staff are specialists in the treatment of Anorexia. Our medical staff and dietitians are skilled in helping clients achieve medical stability through gradual weight gain, re-hydration and nutritional supplements. Our clinical staff are compassionate and will help clients gain insight into the purpose and function of their
anorexia so that treatment can be effective. We will help you learn new coping skills, learn to manage anxiety around food, body image, and other life stressors, and provide a gradual exposure to a real life environment through our continuum of care.

http://www.monarchcovetreatment.com/what-we-treat/anorexia-nervosa/?infinity=gaw~Eating%20Disorders~Anorexia~43438399888~effects%20of%20anorexia~b&gclid=CPT7jq_2vLoCFUXhQgodWWQAihQ

**Anorexia Symptoms and Effects**

**What are the Signs and Symptoms of Anorexia?**

The earliest warning signs of anorexia (anorexia nervosa) can be very difficult to distinguish from normal eating or dieting behavior. Anorexia symptoms may also be concealed, attributed to other health conditions or dismissed as side effects of prescription drugs.

However, **eating disorder treatment** professionals can distinguish symptoms of anorexia from other medical conditions by identifying physical signs such as:

- extreme weight loss
- thin appearance
- abnormal blood counts
- elevated liver enzymes
- fatigue
- dizziness or fainting
- seizure
- brittle nails
- hair that thins, breaks or falls out
- absence of menstruation (amenorrhea)
- development of fine hair on the extremities (lanugo)
- constipation
- dry skin
- intolerance of cold
- irregular heart rhythms
- low blood pressure
- dehydration
- osteoporosis, the loss of bone calcium, which may result in broken bones

**What Are the Warning Signs of Anorexia Nervosa?**
Most early signs of anorexia center on preoccupation with food or dieting. Behavior may appear obsessive or compulsive, and begin to consume more time. Eventually, disordered eating patterns will become more noticeable to others and potentially disrupt schooling, career, and relationships with family and friends.

If you’re concerned that you or someone you love may have an eating disorder, watch for these early warning signs of anorexia:

- refusal to eat
- denial of hunger, even when starving
- difficulty concentrating
- obsession with body size and shape
- skipping meals
- making excuses for not eating
- eating only a few certain foods considered safe, usually those low in fat and calories
- adopting meal or eating rituals, such as cutting food into tiny pieces or spitting food out after chewing
- weighing food
- cooking elaborate meals for others but refusing to eat

In men or women with an abnormal preoccupation with food, several other behaviors should also be recognized as clear warning signs of anorexia nervosa, or possibly other eating or body image disorders:

- excessive exercise
- flat mood, or lack of emotion
- repeated weighing of themselves
- frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws
- wearing baggy or layered clothing
- complaining about being fat

**What is Anorexia?**

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder in which a person is obsessed with weight, body shape and food intake to the point of self-imposed starvation. Anorexia symptoms frequently develop over a period of years in women and men with certain genetic, emotional or life-
experience predispositions. Anorexia most often develops in young women during the teenage years, but increasing reports cite symptoms of anorexia and other eating disorders in pre-teen girls and boys.

Anorexia nervosa symptoms appear in two inter-related patterns:

- Conscious refusal to maintain a body weight that's healthy for a man or woman's age and height
- Severely distorted self-image, and obsession with the perception that he or she is overweight, even when severely underweight

To prevent weight gain or to continue losing weight, a person with anorexia nervosa will severely restrict food intake or exercise excessively, and resist efforts to change behavior. Some anorexics purge after eating regular meals or engage in binge eating followed by purging. Without proper eating disorder treatment, anorexia can reduce a person to a point where he or she is skeletally thin but still perceives that they are overweight.

Anorexia nervosa causes are much more serious than excessive dieting, an unhealthy view of food or an obsession with body image. Although anorexia is most distinguished by disordered eating behaviors and rituals, the disease process involves much more than food. Anorexia symptoms are ultimately attempts to cope with seemingly unmanageable emotions by achieving perfectionism and control. For a man or woman with anorexia nervosa, recognition of self-worth often centers on ability to reach a goal of thinness or maintain control over the body and appetite.

**What Causes Anorexia?**

Much work remains to be done to understand the causes of anorexia nervosa. As with bulimia, other eating disorders, and addiction, anorexia involves complicated interaction among biological, psychological and social factors.

Doctors, therapists and staff at anorexia treatment centers have more recently acknowledged that genetics play a part in the development of anorexia. A young woman with a biological sibling or parent with an eating disorder is at higher risk, suggesting a possible genetic link. However, it's not clear specifically how genetics may interact with other contributing factors. It may be that some people have a genetic tendency toward perfectionism, sensitivity and rigidity, all traits associated with anorexia nervosa.

Psychological and emotional characteristics may also leave some people more susceptible to seeking emotional relief through self-starvation. Common examples observed in anorexics are:
Low self-esteem, which may stem from unresolved experiences of neglect or abuse during childhood

Obsessive or compulsive personality traits, which make it easier to adhere to strict diets and resist hunger

Perfectionism, when centered on the body leads to thought distortions such as "I'm never thin enough."

Low levels of serotonin, one of the brain chemicals involved in depression

Cultural influences can also contribute to the development of anorexia nervosa. Our society sends a constant stream of media reinforcing thinness as an ideal, especially for young women. Television, magazines, and billboards are filled with images of unrealistically thin models, athletes and actresses/actors. Success and worth are often equated with being thin. Peer pressure may fuel the desire to be thin, particularly among teen girls, who over time view anorexic symptoms as normal, even positive traits.

What are the Effects of Anorexia Nervosa?

Anorexia's effects vary depending on the severity of the disease. They tend to worsen as thoughts about food crowd out more and more of an anorexic's thoughts.

- Forced withdrawal from school or college
- Loss of connection to faith or religion
- Career disruption
- Isolation from friends and family
- Suicide

The physical effects of starvation are often irreversible, and reflect the extremely high rate of deaths associated with anorexia nervosa:

- Infertility
- Shutdown of major body systems
- Brain damage
- Heart attacks
- Death

What Other Signs or Symptoms Should I Look For?

Anorexia nervosa is a complicated disease that affects each man or woman differently. There are several patterns of anorexia signs and symptoms that eating disorders treatment specialists know to look for:
Co-occurring Alcoholism

Adolescent women with anorexia show a dramatically greater incidence of alcoholism than the rest of their peer group. This can occur when efforts to numb feelings of inadequacy by restricting food intake fail to bring the control and emotional relief a woman with anorexia seeks. College-aged women in particular are much more likely to show symptoms of co-occurring alcohol addiction along with anorexia nervosa.

Abuse of Stimulants

Many over the counter energy boosters, dietary supplements and prescription stimulants, such as medication for ADHD, have appetite suppressing side effects. Because of the ready availability of these drugs in schools and on college campuses, adolescents with anorexia are particularly susceptible to the temptation to misuse them to suppress appetite.

Co-occurring Disorders

Anorexia nervosa often co-exists with major depression, anxiety disorders, or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). These are called co-occurring disorders, and they are difficult for many treatment providers to diagnose accurately and treat effectively in conjunction with an eating disorder. Patients whose anorexia nervosa treatment fails to address co-occurring disorders will face a vastly more difficult treatment path and more complex challenges in recovery.

Purging Behaviors with Starvation

Many with symptoms of anorexia show signs of a separate variation, the binge-purge type. Persons with this type of anorexia disorder will not only self-starve, but also take other actions to reduce their weight. This may include exercising obsessively, or abusing laxatives, diuretics / water pills, or other diet drugs.

http://www.timberlineknolls.com/eating-disorder/anorexia/signs-effects

What is anorexia nervosa?

Anorexia nervosa is a complex eating disorder with three key features:

- refusal to maintain a healthy body weight
- an intense fear of gaining weight
- a distorted body image
Because of your dread of becoming fat or disgusted with how your body looks, eating and mealtimes may be very stressful. And yet, what you can and can’t eat is practically all you can think about.

Thoughts about dieting, food, and your body may take up most of your day—leaving little time for friends, family, and other activities you used to enjoy. Life becomes a relentless pursuit of thinness and going to extremes to lose weight.

But no matter how skinny you become, it’s never enough.

While people with anorexia often deny having a problem, the truth is that anorexia is a serious and potentially deadly eating disorder. Fortunately, recovery is possible. With proper treatment and support, you or someone you care about can break anorexia’s self-destructive pattern and regain health and self-confidence.

**Types of anorexia nervosa**

There are two types of anorexia. In the restricting type of anorexia, weight loss is achieved by restricting calories (following drastic diets, fasting, and exercising to excess). In the purging type of anorexia, weight loss is achieved by vomiting or using laxatives and diuretics.

**Anorexia is not about weight or food**

Believe it or not, anorexia isn’t really about food and weight—at least not at its core. Eating disorders are much more complicated than that. The food and weight-related issues are symptoms of something deeper: things like depression, loneliness, insecurity, pressure to be perfect, or feeling out of control. Things that no amount of dieting or weight loss can cure.

**What need does anorexia meet in your life?**

It’s important to understand that anorexia meets a need in your life. For example, you may feel powerless in many parts of your life, but you can control what you eat. Saying “no” to food, getting the best of hunger, and controlling the number on the scale may make you feel strong and successful—at least for a short while. You may even come to enjoy your hunger pangs as reminders of a “special talent” that most people can’t achieve.

Anorexia may also be a way of distracting yourself from difficult emotions. When you spend most of your time thinking about food, dieting, and weight loss, you don’t have to face other problems in your life or deal with complicated emotions.

Unfortunately, any boost you get from starving yourself or shedding pounds is extremely short-lived. Dieting and weight loss can’t repair the negative self-image at the heart of
anorexia. The only way to do that is to identify the emotional need that self-starvation fulfills and find other ways to meet it.

**Signs and symptoms of anorexia**

Living with anorexia means you’re constantly hiding your habits. This makes it hard at first for friends and family to spot the warning signs. When confronted, you might try to explain away your disordered eating and wave away concerns. But as anorexia progresses, people close to you wont be able to deny their instincts that something is wrong—and neither should you.

As anorexia develops, you become increasingly preoccupied with the number on the scale, how you look in the mirror, and what you can and can’t eat.

**Anorexic food behavior signs and symptoms**

- Dieting despite being thin – Following a severely restricted diet. Eating only certain low-calorie foods. Banning “bad” foods such as carbohydrates and fats.
- Obsession with calories, fat grams, and nutrition – Reading food labels, measuring and weighing portions, keeping a food diary, reading diet books.
- Pretending to eat or lying about eating – Hiding, playing with, or throwing away food to avoid eating. Making excuses to get out of meals (“I had a huge lunch” or “My stomach isn’t feeling good.”).
- Preoccupation with food – Constantly thinking about food. Cooking for others, collecting recipes, reading food magazines, or making meal plans while eating very little.
- Strange or secretive food rituals – Refusing to eat around others or in public places. Eating in rigid, ritualistic ways (e.g. cutting food “just so”, chewing food and spitting it out, using a specific plate).

**Anorexic appearance and body image signs and symptoms**

- Dramatic weight loss – Rapid, drastic weight loss with no medical cause.
- Feeling fat, despite being underweight – You may feel overweight in general or just “too fat” in certain places such as the stomach, hips, or thighs.
- Fixation on body image – Obsessed with weight, body shape, or clothing size. Frequent weigh-ins and concern over tiny fluctuations in weight.
- Harshly critical of appearance – Spending a lot of time in front of the mirror checking for flaws. There’s always something to criticize. You’re never thin enough.
- Denial that you’re too thin – You may deny that your low body weight is a problem, while trying to conceal it (drinking a lot of water before being weighed, wearing baggy or oversized clothes).

**Purging signs and symptoms**
• **Using diet pills, laxatives, or diuretics** – Abusing water pills, herbal appetite suppressants, prescription stimulants, ipecac syrup, and other drugs for weight loss.

• **Throwing up after eating** – Frequently disappearing after meals or going to the bathroom. May run the water to disguise sounds of vomiting or reappear smelling like mouthwash or mints.

• **Compulsive exercising** – Following a punishing exercise regimen aimed at burning calories. Exercising through injuries, illness, and bad weather. Working out extra hard after bingeing or eating something “bad.”

### Anorexia nervosa causes and risk factors

There are no simple answers to the causes of anorexia and other eating disorders. Anorexia is a complex condition that arises from a combination of many social, emotional, and biological factors. Although our culture’s idealization of thinness plays a powerful role, there are many other contributing factors, including your family environment, emotional difficulties, low self-esteem, and traumatic experiences you may have gone through in the past.

### Psychological causes and risk factors for anorexia

People with anorexia are often perfectionists and overachievers. They’re the “good” daughters and sons who do what they’re told, excel in everything they do, and focus on pleasing others. But while they may appear to have it all together, inside they feel helpless, inadequate, and worthless. Through their harshly critical lens, if they’re not perfect, they’re a total failure.

### Family and social pressures

In addition to the cultural pressure to be thin, there are other family and social pressures that can contribute to anorexia. This includes participation in an activity that demands slenderness, such as ballet, gymnastics, or modeling. It also includes having parents who are overly controlling, put a lot of emphasis on looks, diet themselves, or criticize their children’s bodies and appearance. Stressful life events—such as the onset of puberty, a breakup, or going away to school—can also trigger anorexia.

### Biological causes of anorexia

Research suggests that a genetic predisposition to anorexia may run in families. If a girl has a sibling with anorexia, she is 10 to 20 times more likely than the general population to develop anorexia herself. Brain chemistry also plays a significant role. People with anorexia tend to have high levels of cortisol, the brain hormone most related to stress, and decreased levels of serotonin and norepinephrine, which are associated with feelings of well-being.
Effects of anorexia

One thing is certain about anorexia. Severe calorie restriction has dire physical effects. When your body doesn’t get the fuel it needs to function normally, it goes into starvation mode and slows down to conserve energy. Essentially, your body begins to consume itself. If self-starvation continues and more body fat is lost, medical complications pile up and your body and mind pay the price.

Some of the physical effects of anorexia include:

- Severe mood swings; depression
- Lack of energy and weakness
- Slowed thinking; poor memory
- Dry, yellowish skin and brittle nails
- Constipation and bloating
- Tooth decay and gum damage
- Dizziness, fainting, and headaches
- Growth of fine hair all over the body and face

Getting help for anorexia

If you or a loved one has anorexia...

Call the National Eating Disorders Association’s toll-free hotline at 1-800-931-2237 for free referrals, information, and advice.

Deciding to get help for anorexia is not an easy choice to make. It’s not uncommon to feel like anorexia is part of your identity—or even your “friend.”

You may think that anorexia has such a powerful hold over you that you’ll never be able to overcome it. But while change is hard, it is possible.

Steps to anorexia recovery

- **Admit you have a problem.** Up until now, you’ve been invested in the idea that life will be better—that you’ll finally feel good—if you lose more weight. The first step in anorexia recovery is admitting that your relentless pursuit of thinness is out of your control and acknowledging the physical and emotional damage that you’ve suffered because of it.

- **Talk to someone.** It can be hard to talk about what you’re going through, especially if you’ve kept your anorexia a secret for a long time. You may be ashamed, ambivalent, or afraid. But it’s important to understand that you’re not alone. Find a good listener—someone who will support you as you try to get better.
• **Stay away from people, places, and activities that trigger your obsession with being thin.** You may need to avoid looking at fashion or fitness magazines, spend less time with friends who constantly diet and talk about losing weight, and stay away from weight loss web sites and “pro-ana” sites that promote anorexia.

• **Seek professional help.** The advice and support of trained eating disorder professionals can help you regain your health, learn to eat normally again, and develop healthier attitudes about food and your body.

### Anorexia treatment and therapy

Since anorexia involves both mind and body, a team approach to treatment is often best. Those who may be involved in anorexia treatment include medical doctors, psychologists, counselors, and dieticians. The participation and support of family members also makes a big difference in treatment success. Having a team around you that you can trust and rely on will make recovery easier.

Treating anorexia involves three steps:

- Getting back to a healthy weight
- Starting to eat more food
- Changing how you think about yourself and food

### Medical treatment for anorexia

The first priority in anorexia treatment is addressing and stabilizing any serious health issues. Hospitalization may be necessary if you are dangerously malnourished or so distressed that you no longer want to live. You may also need to be hospitalized until you reach a less critical weight. Outpatient treatment is an option when you’re not in immediate medical danger.

### Nutritional treatment for anorexia

A second component of anorexia treatment is nutritional counseling. A nutritionist or dietician will teach you about healthy eating and proper nutrition. The nutritionist will also help you develop and follow meal plans that include enough calories to reach or maintain a normal, healthy weight.

### Counseling and therapy for anorexia

Counseling is crucial to anorexia treatment. Its goal is to identify the negative thoughts and feelings that fuel your eating disorder and replace them with healthier, less distorted beliefs. Another important goal of counseling is to teach you how to deal with difficult emotions, relationship problems, and stress in a productive, rather than a self-destructive, way.
Getting past your fear of gaining weight

Getting back to a normal weight is no easy task. The thought of gaining weight is probably extremely frightening—especially if you’re being forced—and you may be tempted to resist. But research shows that the closer your body weight is to normal at the end of treatment, the greater your chance of recovery, so getting to a healthy weight should be a top treatment goal.

Try to understand that your fear of gaining weight is a symptom of your anorexia. Reading about anorexia or talking to other people who have lived with it can help. It also helps to be honest about your feelings and fears—including your family and your treatment team. The better they understand what you’re going through, the better support you’ll receive.

Helping an anorexic person

Encouraging an anorexic friend or family member to get treatment is the most caring and supportive thing you can do. But because of the defensiveness and denial involved in anorexia, you’ll need to tread lightly. Waving around articles about the dire effects of anorexia or declaring “You’ll die if you don’t eat!” probably won’t work. A better approach is to gently express your concerns and let the person know that you’re available to listen. If your loved one is willing to talk, listen without judgment, no matter how out of touch the person sounds.

It’s deeply distressing to know that your child or someone you love may be struggling with anorexia. There’s no way to solve the problem yourself, but here are a few ideas for what you can do now to help make a difference for someone you love.

Tips for helping a person with anorexia

- **Think of yourself as an “outsider.”** In other words, someone not suffering from anorexia. In this position, there isn’t a lot you can do to “solve” your loved one’s anorexia. It is ultimately the individual’s choice to decide when they are ready.
- **Be a role model** for healthy eating, exercising, and body image. Don’t make negative comments about your own body or anyone else’s.
- **Take care of yourself.** Seek advice from a health professional, even if your friend or family member won’t. And you can bring others—from peers to parents—into the circle of support.
- **Don’t act like the food police.** A person with anorexia needs compassion and support, not an authority figure standing over the table with a calorie counter.
- **Avoid threats, scare tactics, angry outbursts, and put-downs.** Bear in mind that anorexia is often a symptom of extreme emotional distress and develops out of an attempt to manage emotional pain, stress, and/or self-hate. Negative communication will only make it worse.

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anorexia_signs_symptoms-causes_treatment.htm