



Psykisk helse

ENGELSK

# Eating disorders

Spiseforstyrrelser

## What is an eating disorder?

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**Do you have thoughts and feelings about food, your own body, or your weight that affect your quality of life and your daily functioning? In that case, you might have an eating disorder.**

Approximately 27,000 Norwegian women between the ages of 15 and 44 suffer from anorexia. 18,000 suffer from bulimia and 28,000 from compulsive eating (Gøtestam and Rosenvinge, 2002). Eating disorders most often surface between the ages of 12 and 19, but can also present later in life. 90 percent of those afflicted are women, but men can also develop the disease. The illness is found in all kinds of environments, but is possibly over-represented in the world of esthetics, weight-dependent sports, ballet, and fashion.

An eating disorder is a mental illness that one requires help to overcome. It is not something you just grow out of over time. With the right treatment you can make a complete recovery, but it is important to ask for help.

## Three types of eating disorders

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**We distinguish between three kinds of disorder - anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive eating. A person's experience cannot always be defined by a single category, as eating habits can change at different times in life.**

Some people go through all the variations of food abuse in varying order, while others live with one form of abuse the entire time. Some people also may have a combination with characteristics from several types of eating disorders.



## Do you recognize any of these symptoms?

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### **Anorexia**

- Do you limit what you eat, and how much? Anorexia is a resistance to maintain a body weight above the minimum normal weight according to age and height.
- Do you have an intense fear of gaining weight?
- Do you have a distorted experience of your body weight, size, or shape? Do you feel your body, or parts of it are fat, even if others say you are thin?
- Have you missed three consecutive menstrual cycles? (for women)

### **Bulimia**

- Have you had repeated episodes of overeating (rapid consumption of large amounts of food over a certain length of time)?
- Do you experience a lack of control over your food intake (a feeling of not being able to stop eating or regulate the amount)?
- Do you regularly resort to either provoked vomiting, laxatives, diuretics, strict diets or fasting, and/or intense physical exercise in order to not gain weight?

### **Compulsive eating**

- Do you periodically overeat and subsequently diet, fast, exercise intensely or abuse laxatives?
- Do you have irregular and destructive eating habits, but no vomiting?
- Do you have great weight swings? Compulsive eaters can be both overweight and normal weight.



## What lies behind the symptoms?

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Eating disorders are an external sign of inner, emotional imbalance. Food consumption for someone with an eating disorder, is not determined by hunger or feeling full, but by a complex interaction of psychological and biological factors. For a bulimic, overeating and vomiting can be a way to temporarily relieve inner unrest, sadness, and/or feelings of inadequacy. For the anorexic, controlling food and weight can give a temporary feeling of control, not just over one's body, but one's very being.

## Causes of eating disorders

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Because of the complex nature of eating disorders, we find there is not just one cause for such an illness. We believe that biological, psychological, and cultural factors all contribute to the development of the disease. An eating disorder is more than just a regular diet that has gone out of control.

Eating disorders often begin with quite "innocent" diets by a teenager dissatisfied with her life. This is generally related to demands and expectations regarding new roles, or other feelings of stress she might experience in life. In an attempt to restore a sense of inner balance, the teenager directs her attention toward her own body and tries to rigorously control it. One's environment and reactions from others can serve to intensify symptoms. This could for example be in settings

where high performance is strongly valued or with a marked focus on body and appearance.

## Treatment

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**Most people who suffer from eating disorders need treatment and help. A patient's own efforts and motivation are extremely important in all phases of the illness. Family and friends are also important support persons. They can help motivate the patient to both get treatment and see it through.**

The treatment builds on the patient's own strength. The strong will of the anorexic can be a powerful force when properly applied, while the bulimic's strengths lie in an appetite for life and flexibility.

Treatment is focused on:

- Normalizing eating habits
- Promoting maturity and development
- Improving the ability to tackle feelings and stress without turning to food

For information on where to find treatment for eating disorders in Norway, go to the web site of the National Clinical Network for Eating Disorders, **at [www.nkns.no](http://www.nkns.no)**.



## Treatment methods

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There are various types of treatment for eating disorders. The most common are:

### **Psychotherapy**

This is a treatment where the patient has regular conversations with a psychotherapist, usually over several years, working on gaining control over disturbed eating patterns. For recovery to last, it is important that in the course of therapy, the patient comes to better understand his/her own feelings and needs, and gains an understanding of the underlying causes of the eating disorder.

### **The clinical nutritionist**

Advice is given about diet and nutrition. In collaboration with the patient, the nutritionist can put together a nutrition plan specially adapted to the individual, and aiming at re-establishing normal eating habits.

### **Physiotherapy**

This form of treatment can help the patient to re-establish a more realistic image and experience of his/her body.

### **Medication**

Medication can be used in conjunction with other therapy in cases of depression, serious anxiety, and sleep disorders.

### **You can find help here:**

#### *Examination by a doctor*

The patient should be examined regularly by a doctor because of the danger of serious physical complications.

*It is possible to be healthy, and you can get the help you need!*

- Your own doctor/outpatient medical services
- Your local health centre/school health services
- Psychiatric nurse (contact the main switchboard in your municipality)

## Support groups and self-help

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These groups can be of great help as a supplement to treatment. They spread information about eating disorders, motivate change, and provide as such hope and support for the patient and their relatives.

- Interessegrupper for kvinner med spiseforstyrrelser (Interest group for women with eating disorders), Oslo **[www.iks.no](http://www.iks.no)**
- Anorexia/Bulimia Foreningen (Association for anorexia/bulimia), Bergen
- Senter for Spiseforstyrrelser (Center for eating disorders), Stavanger





Psyisk helse

IS-1470

## Where to seek help

Emergency – call 113  
Doctor/Casualty  
Support phone: 810 30 030

## Useful information

[www.psyisk.no](http://www.psyisk.no)  
[www.psyiskhelse.no](http://www.psyiskhelse.no)  
[www.mentalhelse.no](http://www.mentalhelse.no)  
[www.psykopp.no](http://www.psykopp.no)  
[www.nyinorge.no](http://www.nyinorge.no)  
[www.nakmi.no](http://www.nakmi.no)

## Broshures on mental health



Anxiety  
IS-1465



Depression  
IS-1466



Obsessive Compulsive  
Disorders IS-1469



Eating disorders  
IS-1470



Psychosis  
IS-1471



AD/HD  
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Legal protection  
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Mental health care in Norway  
• For adults, IS-1472  
• For young people, IS-1474  
• About young children, IS-1473



BUP  
• Children, IS-1301  
• Young people, IS-1302  
• Adults, IS-1303

Brochures can be downloaded at [www.psyisk.no](http://www.psyisk.no) under Information Material.

This brochure can be found in 'bokmål' and 'nynorsk', the two official languages of Norway, English, Arabic, Farsi, French, Kurdish/Sorani, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Lappish, Serbian/Croatian, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

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Sosial- og helsedirektoratet