

Anorexia Nervosa

Symptoms

The physical signs and symptoms of anorexia nervosa are related to starvation. Anorexia also includes emotional and behavioral issues involving an unrealistic perception of body weight and an extremely strong fear of gaining weight or becoming fat.

It may be difficult to notice signs and symptoms because what is considered a low body weight is different for each person, and some individuals may not appear extremely thin. Also, people with anorexia often disguise their thinness, eating habits or physical problems.

Physical symptoms

Physical signs and symptoms of anorexia may include:

- Extreme weight loss or not making expected developmental weight gains
- Thin appearance
- Abnormal blood counts
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Dizziness or fainting
- Bluish discoloration of the fingers
- Hair that thins, breaks or falls out
- Soft, downy hair covering the body
- Absence of menstruation
- Constipation and abdominal pain

- Dry or yellowish skin
- Intolerance of cold
- Irregular heart rhythms
- Low blood pressure
- Dehydration
- Swelling of arms or legs
- Eroded teeth and calluses on the knuckles from induced vomiting

Some people who have anorexia binge and purge, similar to individuals who have bulimia. But people with anorexia generally struggle with an abnormally low body weight, while individuals with bulimia typically are normal to above normal weight.

Emotional and behavioral symptoms

Behavioral symptoms of anorexia may include attempts to lose weight by:

- Severely restricting food intake through dieting or fasting
- Exercising excessively
- Bingeing and self-induced vomiting to get rid of food, which may include the use of laxatives, enemas, diet aids or herbal products

Emotional and behavioral signs and symptoms may include:

- Preoccupation with food, which sometimes includes cooking elaborate meals for others but not eating them
- Frequently skipping meals or refusing to eat
- Denial of hunger or making excuses for not eating
- Eating only a few certain "safe" foods, usually those low in fat and calories
- Adopting rigid meal or eating rituals, such as spitting food out after chewing

- Not wanting to eat in public
- Lying about how much food has been eaten
- Fear of gaining weight that may include repeated weighing or measuring the body
- Frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws
- Complaining about being fat or having parts of the body that are fat
- Covering up in layers of clothing
- Flat mood (lack of emotion)
- Social withdrawal
- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Reduced interest in sex