

Eating disorders

The term eating disorder is used to describe a disorder affecting thoughts, feelings and actions relating to food. If you have an eating disorder, your relationship with food and eating is different from most people's. You may eat excessive amounts or diet excessively, or alternate between the two. It can lead to (extreme) underweight or overweight and even people with a normal weight may have an eating disorder.

There are various types of eating disorder. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder are the most well-known. Literally, anorexia nervosa means a lack of appetite caused by nerves, which is misleading, as rather than having a lack of appetite, you have a desire to be thin and to be in control of your food intake and your weight. People with anorexia nervosa are scared of gaining weight and continue to feel they are fat even if they are actually thin. Bulimia nervosa literally means having the appetite of an ox caused by nerves. People who have bulimia have a compulsion to eat a lot in a short space of time. Such periods alternate with periods of eating very little. The eating spells are often compensated by vomiting spells, the use of laxatives or extreme sports activities. Binge eating disorder is very similar to bulimia nervosa, the main difference being that people do not compensate after bingeing, and therefore leading to weight increase.

Little is known even now about the causes of eating disorders and it is difficult to predict if someone is likely to develop such a disorder. There are, however, known risk factors that may play a role in the development and continuation of eating disorders:

- Biological (e.g. disruption to the appetite and satiation system)
- Cultural (e.g. the Thin Ideal)
- Psychological (e.g. anxiety, lack of self-confidence, extreme perfectionism, the need for control over one's life)
- Family factors (e.g. overprotection and conflict avoidance by a parent, traumatic experiences, an inability to talk about problems)

Eating disorders can affect the way you function in various respects:

- Your social well-being (e.g. becoming isolated, avoiding classes or parties, being unable to eat with other people)
- Your emotional well-being (e.g. anxiety, depression, lack of confidence)
- Your physical well-being (e.g. hair loss, tooth loss, disrupted hormones, fatigue, dizziness, listlessness, inability to concentrate, cardiac problems)

Some consequences, such as seriously disrupted heart rhythms, can even result in death. Other symptoms disappear when the eating disorder has been treated.

QuickScan

- Do you regularly skip meals or avoid certain foods?
- Do you think a lot about what you eat or have eaten?
- Are you unhappy and preoccupied with your weight?
- Are you preoccupied with your body size?
- Do you on occasions find it difficult to stop eating?
- Do you compensate your food intake, for example by making yourself sick, taking laxatives, engaging in excessive sport or excessive dieting?
- Do you often feel listless, without energy to move?
- Do you have strong mood swings and regularly become irritable?

Approach

What can you do yourself?

You can take the first step yourself by adopting a regular pattern of living and eating and ensuring you eat enough by following the standard guidelines (<http://www.voedingscentrum.nl/nl/service/english/what-do-we-do-.aspx>).

What can we do for you?

The sooner you ask for help, the greater the likelihood of improvement. We offer short-term individual consultation and/or help you look for a suitable treatment outside of TU Delft. Visit <http://psychologists.tudelft.nl>.

More information

- <http://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/information/eating-disorder>