

Warning Signs of an Eating Disorder

What to look for when someone has an eating disorder, whether it is Anorexia, Bulimia, or Binge-Eating Disorder. All of us lately seem to worry about what we are eating, how we look in our clothes, and what foods we eat at home and when we go out to restaurants. For individuals with an eating disorder, it goes way beyond simple worry, it consumes them and seems to be all that they are able to think about. At the very beginning stages of an eating disorder, it is not very clear-cut what is simple weight consciousness and what is overeating types of behaviors and what defines an eating disorder. As the disorder progresses however, the signs become real clear if you know what you are looking for.

A very easy sign of an eating disorder is for those individuals who are restricting their food intake. They skip meals all together or say frequently that they are not hungry or take a bite of their food and say that they are full on a consistent basis. Another sign to look for is when they start to take diet-pills or will only eat foods that are real low in calories and seem to count the calories in all of the foods that they are eating. In individuals that are bingeing, which is seen in Anorexia, Binge-Eating/Purging Type, Bulimia, and also in Binge-Eating Disorder, these individuals appear to eat normally when they are in front of other people, but they often will eat and gorge themselves in secret or eat very late at night. Look for wrappers, containers, empty food boxes that may be hidden around the house, under their bed, or in the garbage. They are bingeing and then trying to hide the foods that they have eaten. For purging behaviors, what a person can look for is when you seen a person with an eating disorder going out of their way to burn off all of the calories they have just eaten. Often in treatment what I see is the person immediately has to go to the bathroom after they have eaten or they have to go “work out” to burn those calories off. If the person with an eating disorder is more inventive, they will often run the water at the sink or tub to drown out the sounds of them vomiting and they will use mints, mouthwash, or chew gum to disguise the smell of their vomiting.

The hallmark symptom of individuals with an eating distorted is a distorted self-image and they are consumed with how they look. They try to disguise weight loss by wearing clothes that are too big for them. The most common signs of someone that has an eating disorder are weight loss, avoiding going out with friends/family to eat at a restaurant, uses laxatives or diet pills, constantly “on a diet”, exercises or work outs incessantly, disappears to the bathroom after every meal, and food items missing from the house.

If you are observing many of these signs/symptoms in a friend or family member, they may indeed have an eating disorder. Professional help is recommended for individuals with an eating

disorder and your concerns over their health should be done in such a way that is tactful and not forceful in nature.

Kara T. Tamanini, M.S., LMHC
Author and Therapist
Founder of Kids Awareness Series
www.KidsAwarenessSeries.com

Kara T. Tamanini is a licensed therapist that works with children/adolescents with a variety of childhood mental disorders.