Eating Disorders

The most common eating disorders include anorexia and bulimia. Individuals who are anorexic starve themselves and are often very thin and afraid to gain weight. Due to severe weight loss, these individuals are at risk for dry skin and hair, cold hands and feet, general weakness, constipation and digestive problems, insomnia and absence of menstrual periods. When too much weight is lost, these individuals may develop more severe problems such as susceptibility to infections, stress fractures, severe chemical imbalances and weaknesses of the heart muscle that can lead to death.

Bulimic individuals usually are of average or above average weight. These individuals binge and purge, usually in secret. As a result they may have rapid weight loss or gain. Purging can involve self-induced vomiting, abusing laxatives and diuretics, fasting or over-exercising. They may suffer from dehydration, constipation and digestive disorders, muscle weakness and severe dental problems.

It is OK to go on a diet on occasion. However, if you feel your eating is out of control or feel that it plays too big of a role in your life, you may want to be assessed for a eating disorder. The following questions can be used to help determine if you may have a problem:

1. I constantly think about eating, weight and body size.
2. I become anxious prior to eating.
3. I’m terrified about being overweight.
4. I don’t know when I’m physically hungry.
5. I go on eating binges and can’t stop eating until I feel sick.
6. I often feel bloated or uncomfortable after meals.
7. I spend a lot of time daydreaming about food.
8. I weigh myself several times each day.
9. I exercise too much or get very rigid about my exercise plan.
10. I believe that being in control of food shows.
11. I have taken laxatives or forced myself to vomit after eating.
12. I believe food controls by life.
13. I feel extremely guilty after eating.
14. I eat when I am nervous, anxious, lonely or depressed.
15. I don’t think I look good in my clothes.
16. Because of my weight and appearance, I’m more uptight than I’d like to be around people who I find attractive.

Review your answers. If you feel your eating habits are affecting your life or making you sick, it may be time to make changes. These changes could include seeking medical attention, consulting a nutritionist or obtaining counseling.