

What is Anorexia?



Anorexia nervosa, usually shortened to **anorexia**, is an eating disorder that involves very low body weight, fear of gaining weight, and the use of extreme behaviors to stay underweight.

Many people who have anorexia strive to be thin by severely restricting food intake, nearly to the point of starvation. Others exercise excessively, use laxatives, or intentionally vomit in an attempt to lose weight. Despite being *underweight*, those with anorexia often view themselves as overweight.

Signs and Symptoms

Everyone's experience with anorexia is unique. Diagnoses should only be made by a qualified professional.

Primary Symptoms

very low body weight	intense fear of gaining weight
distorted view of body weight or shape	self-esteem dependent on weight
failure to see low body weight as serious	excessive dieting, exercise, or bingeing and purging

Other Signs and Risks

mood swings	amenorrhea (menstruation stops)	skin discoloration
increased risk of suicide	depression and anxiety disorders	obsession with counting calories
heart and organ failure	growth of soft hair on face and body	reproductive complications

Frequently Asked Questions

Who develops anorexia?

Anyone can develop anorexia, but it is about 10 times more common in women. Anorexia also has a genetic component, meaning it runs in families.

When does anorexia begin?

Anorexia usually begins during adolescence or young adulthood, and is often associated with a stressful life event, such as going away to college.

Can anorexia be treated?

Anorexia is difficult to treat, and relapse is common. However, when anorexia goes untreated, it tends to worsen. Most individuals can achieve remission within 5 years.

Treatment

Treatment Providers

Treatment providers may include mental health and family therapists, nutritionists, and medical doctors. These professionals collaborate to treat the medical and mental health components of anorexia.

Levels of Care

Depending on symptom severity and duration of illness, treatment may take place in an outpatient, day program, or hospital setting. A person may transition between different levels of care, sometimes multiple times.

Treatment Goals

Initial treatment goals are to restore a healthy weight and treat physical complications. As treatment progresses, goals focus on underlying issues, such as improving body image and establishing healthy eating habits.