



PSYCHEDUP
with Dr. Diane McIntosh

Eating Disorders



What Is It

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses that go far beyond food or body image, they reflect deep struggles with control, self-worth, and emotion. The most common types include:

- **Anorexia nervosa**, involves intense food restriction and a distorted body image that leads individuals to see themselves as overweight even when they are dangerously underweight.
- **Bulimia nervosa**, marked by cycles of binge eating followed by purging behaviors such as vomiting, fasting, or excessive exercise, in an effort to compensate.
- **Binge eating disorder**, where people regularly consume large amounts of food, often in secret and to the point of physical discomfort, followed by deep guilt or shame. Unlike bulimia, binge eating disorder is not associated with purging behaviours.

These disorders can affect anyone, regardless of sex or body size, and are often driven by complex psychological factors.

Recognizing Symptoms

Eating disorders are among the most destructive of all mental illnesses. They can affect every part of a person's life, body, mind, and relationships. Physically, they may cause extreme weight changes, fatigue, dizziness, heart complications, and even organ failure. Psychologically, they're marked by obsessive thoughts about food, body image, and control, often paired with intense guilt and shame.

- **Anorexia Nervosa:** Symptoms include low energy, significant weight loss, obsessive calorie counting, and a sense of control tied to self-denial and restrictive behaviors around food.
- **Bulimia Nervosa:** People with bulimia may maintain a normal weight, masking intense shame, anxiety, and a preoccupation with food and body image. Physical signs can include swollen glands and dental erosion from vomiting.
- **Binge Eating Disorder:** Symptoms include feeling unable to stop or regulate how much is consumed, eating rapidly, sometimes until feeling painfully full, eating alone due to embarrassment, and experiencing feelings of disgust or depression after binge eating.

Treating Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are complex, but effective treatments exist, often combining medical, psychological, nutritional, and social support.



1. Therapy

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy (IPT), family therapy, and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) help address underlying thoughts, emotions, and relationships.



2. Nutrition

Nutritionists guide healthy eating, meal planning, and recovery-focused nutritional strategies.



3. Support

Peer and family groups provide connection, shared experiences, and coping strategies.



4. Medication

While no drugs specifically target anorexia or bulimia, medications can manage coexisting anxiety, depression, or impulse-control issues. Binge-eating disorder may respond to medications that help with impulse control.



5. Medical care

Regular check-ups and hospitalisation may be needed if weight loss or health complications are severe.



6. Self-care

Stress management, relaxation techniques, adequate sleep, social connection, and enjoyable activities support recovery alongside professional care.



Support Organizations

[The Center for Addiction and Mental Health](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association - British Columbia Division](#)

[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[National Initiative for Eating Disorders](#)

[Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders](#)

[Anorexia and Bulimia Québec \(ANEB\)](#)

Learn more