



presents:

## Disordered Eating and Living

Ours is a culture that encourages (and even rewards) disordered behaviors. While seemingly harmless, disordered eating and living behaviors can lead to serious addictions, eating disorders and health complications. Often these disordered behaviors step in to act as a coping mechanism for stress. In a society where “disordered” living is the norm, it is incredibly important to know what disordered behaviors are and to know what the warning signs are for when they have become potentially dangerous.

### Examples of Potentially Dangerous Disordered Eating and Living Behaviors

- **Foregoing Meals In Order To Drink Alcohol (popular on college campuses).** This is potentially damaging on several fronts; namely, foregoing a meal is a gateway behavior to an eating disorder and binge drinking is a gateway behavior for substance abuse. Those who have the biological predisposition to develop eating disorders or addictions may be seriously compromising their health.
- **Dieting.** Any form of dieting or food restriction constitutes disordered eating. This is the largest cultural “norm” and the one that puts significant individuals at risk for developing eating disorders (including binge eating). Research tells us that the restriction model is one of the most consistent reasons that a person binge eats – most often on the food they were told not to have.
- **Over-Exercising.** This is another gateway behavior for eating disorders, so moderating exercise and the motivation to exercise is a crucial part of healthy living.
- **Cutting or Self-Harming (a new “norm” in schools).** “For every 100,000 adolescents, it is estimated that between 750 and 1,800 will exhibit self-injurious behaviors (SIB) (Suyemoto & Kountz, 2000). This translates to 150,000 to 360,000 students nationwide, more than 70% of whom are female.”
- **Serial Dating.** When people are acting out sexually, it is an indicator that they may be struggling with more serious issues.
- **Focus or Obsession with Body, Shape or Weight.** Though this is another cultural “norm” that can turn into a serious complication.

**“Young people who repeatedly diet, who engage in purging, who self-harm, who use exercise or over-exercise as a way of managing their weight are what we are seeing more and more of in schools and communities because these forms of coping have become normalized in our culture, and they are, therefore, the behaviors in which students are more likely to engage to cope with stress.”**

**~Dr. Ovidio Bermudez, M.D.**

**Medical Director of Eating Recovery Center’s Adolescent Services**



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## Disordered Living vs. A Serious Disorder The Warning Signs



disordered eating    eating disorders



over-exercise    exercise addiction

While we think of these concepts on a continuum where disordered eating or living behaviors are on the one side of the continuum and eating disorders or addictions are on the other, we do know that when individuals transition into an addiction or eating disorder there are a few similar warning signs.

### Warning Signs That There Is a Problem:

1. If the behavior is the activity that is thought about more than anything else during the day.

When a person's mental "head space" is entirely filled with thoughts about any one or two things; such as texting, working out, or dieting it could be a sign that there is a serious problem.

2. When individuals start to feel "guilty," "worthless" or "bad" for their actions.

If a person genuinely feels bad after eating or after NOT exercising, it could be a sign that there is a more serious problem.

3. When "more" is never enough.

If a person has to run more often, drink more often, work out longer, eat more, restrict more, or "beat their time" more, it is a warning sign.

For any of the above warning signs, it is recommended that individuals contact an eating disorders specialist (or applicable specialist). View our "What To Say If You Are Concerned" document for help getting the conversation started with a friend who may be struggling.



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## Other Warning Signs\*

1. If the individual is lying to others to hide their habits or behaviors.
2. When individuals **NEED** to drink / binge eat / exercise in order to relax.
3. When friends, coaches, family members, etc. are worried about the person.
4. If the person is neglecting responsibilities at home or at work or school.
5. The person has lost control over their eating, drinking or exercise.
6. They want to quit, but can't.
7. They have given up other activities because of eating issues, exercise, drugs, alcohol, etc.

**Remember that other illnesses can occur simultaneously, which is why it is important to seek help from a qualified professional.\*\***

Although eating disorders are not addictions, they can sometimes co-occur with a range of other illnesses. For example, depression occurs in up to 70% of patients with eating disorders. Anxiety disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, social phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder, often accompany depression and eating disorders.

Alcohol and other substance abuse or dependence may also co-exist with depression and eating disorders.

**For any of the above warning signs, it is recommended that individuals contact an eating disorders (or applicable) specialist. View our “What To Say If You Are Concerned” document for help getting the conversation started with a friend or loved one who may be struggling.**

\* Modified from [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)

\*\* from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/complete-index.shtml>

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