

Frequently Asked Questions

Starving to be Thin: Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa in Adolescents



1. What is anorexia nervosa?

Anorexia nervosa is an intense fear of weight gain associated with the fear of being overweight and a persistent pursuit of being thin. These fears are usually associated with either restrictive eating patterns or compensatory behaviours, such as exercising or self-induced vomiting. These patients, by definition, are below their standard body weight or are not able to make weight gains when developmentally expected to during puberty.

As presented at the University of British Columbia

Jorge L. Pinzon, MD, FRCPC;
and Shirley Jones, RN,
University of British Columbia

2. What is bulimia nervosa?

Bulimia nervosa is an intense preoccupation with body weight and shape, linked to binge eating followed by compensatory behaviours, such as self-induced vomiting. For these adolescents, weight is usually in the normal range or above it, by virtue of the unhealthy eating practices.

FAQ

3. How many adolescent females suffer?

The reported prevalence of anorexia nervosa in adolescent females between the ages of 15 to 19 years is 0.48%, making it the third most common chronic health condition after obesity and asthma. As for bulimia nervosa, 1% to 5% of female adolescents suffer.

4. What tools are available for screening a patient?

A variety of tools have been developed including the Eating Attitudes Test (Eat-26) or the SCOFF questionnaire.

5. How can I make a patient trust me?

Once the issue has been identified, take the time to review the concepts of consent to treatment and confidentiality with the young person and parents. Try to create a calm, confidential environment, coupled with a non-judgmental approach.

Dx

For an in-depth article on anorexia and bulimia nervosa in adolescents, please go to page 65.