

Anorexia



Anorexia is an eating disorder characterised by a fear of gaining weight, a fear not alleviated as weight is lost. It may include dramatic dieting/weight loss to the extent of starvation. The issue of control is important with individuals denying themselves food and not "giving in".

General symptoms

- Serious and persistent weight loss
- Amenorrhoea (cessation of periods, usually as a consequence of the weight loss)
- Starvation leads to possibility of severe infection and metabolic disturbances
- Constipation
- Abdominal pain
- Cold intolerance
- Lethargy
- Hypotension (low blood pressure)
- Dryness of the skin
- "Lanugo" (fine hair on the trunk and back of the body)
- Osteoporosis

Behavioural symptoms

- Very restrictive diet, usually limited to a few food types only
- Avoiding meals
- Preparing food for rest of family without eating oneself
- Abuse of laxatives
- Increased exercise, often vigorous exercise

Psychological symptoms

- Fear of gaining weight or becoming fat
- Self esteem is connected to body shape, ie weight loss viewed positively as an achievement, weight gain seen as failure of self control
- Distorted body image (perceive body to be larger than it is)
- Preoccupation with thoughts of food
- Preoccupation with calorie-counting every item of food

May also experience:

- Concerns about eating in public
- Feel the need to control their environment
- Perfectionism
- Inflexible thinking
- Limited social spontaneity
- Restrained emotional expression

A seriously underweight individual may experience depressive symptoms, eg low mood, social withdrawal, irritability, insomnia, decreased sex drive.

Treatment

Psychotherapy/counselling. Possible hospitalisation in extreme cases.

SANE, 1st Floor Cityside House, 40 Adler Street, London E1 1EE T: 020 7375 2162 W: www.sane.org.uk

SANE (limited by guarantee) Registered Company Number: 2114937 Registered Charity Number: 296572