Head to Toe: Recognizing the Complications of Eating Disorders

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Who might benefit from this talk

- Family members
- Therapists
- Dieticians
- Someone struggling with an eating disorder yourself

You may know something is wrong, but you may not know just how serious the problem is, and you may not know how to advocate to get help for yourself or someone you care for.
Eating Disorders May Be Invisible

- Eating disorders occur in males and females
- People in average and large size bodies can experience starvation and malnourishment
- Even experienced clinicians may not recognize the medical consequences of EDs
Eating Disorders Come In All Sizes

“Weight is not the only clinical marker of an ED. People who are at normal weight [and high weight] can have EDs.”

(AED Guide to Medical Management)
Eating Disorders are Lethal

- Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder
- About 40% of deaths in Anorexia are from suicide
Comparison of Mortality

Standardized Mortality Ratio

- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Schizophrenia
- Bulimia Nervosa (25-44)
- Bulimia Nervosa (15-24)
- Anorexia Nervosa (25-44)
- Anorexia Nervosa (15-24)

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Eating disorders must be diagnosed to be treated

Earlier diagnosis and treatment of eating disorders lead to fewer medical complications and better outcomes

LeGrange and Loeb 2007
Resource #1

Resource #2

Eating Disorders
A Guide to Medical Care and Complications

By Dr. Philip Mehler
Chief Medical Office of Eating Recovery Center
Medical Complications of Eating Disorders
• In Anorexia (Restricting Type), medical complications are due to **starvation** and **weight loss**

• In Bulimia/Purging Disorders, medical complications are from the **type** and **frequency** of purging
Restricting Anorexia
No system is spared!
General Symptoms

- Weight loss
- Fatigue
- Poor sleep
- Muscle wasting
Psychiatric

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicide
Dermatologic

- Hair changes/loss
- Lanugo
- Dry skin
- Brittle nails
- Acrocyanosis
Acrocyanosis and Delayed Capillary Refill
Cardiovascular

- Arrhythmias
- Low heart rate (bradycardia)
- Low blood pressure
Metabolic

- Low body temperature (hypothermia)
- Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)
- Low thyroid hormone
Gastrointestinal

- Delayed movement of food through stomach (gastroparesis)
- Constipation
- Feeling of fullness
- Nausea after eating
Hormonal

- Loss of period/infertility
- Low testosterone
- Bone loss
Hematologic

Blood cell development failure:

• red blood cells
• white blood cells
• platelets
Bulimia/Purging Disorders
HARMFUL EFFECTS

- DEPRESSION, SEIZURES, & ADDICTION
to diet pills and appetite suppressants like Cocaine and amphetamines

- SWOLLEN SALIVARY GLANDS
  cause puffy face and cheeks

- TEETH DECAY
  cavities, sores and teeth may fall out

- SWOLLEN & SORE THROAT
  bleed, tears and may rupture

- IRREGULAR HEART BEAT
  may occur

- STOMACH ULCERS
  and bleeding

- LIVER & KIDNEY DAMAGE
  death may result

- MUSCLE WEAKNESS
  and spasms

- CONSTANT BLOATING & ABDOMINAL PAIN

- BOWEL MUSCLE DAMAGE
  & constipation

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Eating Recovery Center of California
General Symptoms

- Weight loss or weight gain
- Fatigue
- Poor sleep
Psychiatric

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Addiction
- Suicide
- Mood swings
Head, Eyes, Ears, Nose, and Throat (HEENT)

- Dental erosion
- Parotid gland swelling
- Sore throat
Gastrointestinal

- Heartburn (GERD)
- Ulcers
- Bleeding
- Esophageal tear/rupture
- Constipation from laxative abuse
- Permanent bowel muscle damage (cathartic colon syndrome)
Cardiovascular

• Arrhythmias
• Low heart rate (bradycardia)
• Palpitations
• High blood pressure
  (from diet pill toxicity)
Metabolic

• Low potassium (hypokalemia)
• Dehydration
• Disruption in acid-base balance (metabolic alkalosis)
Hormonal

• Irregular periods

• Disrupted fluid balance → extreme swelling after STOPPING purging (Pseudo-Bartter’s syndrome)
Most medical complications from eating disorders will resolve with appropriate and adequate treatment.
Eating Recovery Center of California
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