

a healthy balance

Did you know your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) could help?

Recognizing and treating eating disorders

There are many factors that are thought to contribute to eating disorders, ranging from society's preoccupation with weight to an individual's low self-esteem. No matter what the cause, the first step in overcoming the disorder – and preventing the potentially harmful consequences – is to be able to recognize the signs of unhealthy eating.

Recognizing the signs

While it's difficult to estimate the number of people that suffer from eating disorders, the numbers appear to be on the rise. Following are the different types of eating disorders as identified by the American Psychiatric Association:

- Anorexia nervosa is identified by excessive weight loss from self-starvation. They may also engage in over-exercising or over-eating followed by self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, enemas or diuretics.
- Bulimia nervosa is characterized by a cycle of discrete binge eating that is followed by purging through methods such as self-induced vomiting, using laxatives or over-exercising.
- Binge eating is identified by periods of uncontrolled, continuous or impulsive eating beyond the point of feeling comfortably full. The binge eater typically does not purge, but may be involved in sporadic fasts or diets. Body weight may vary from mild to severe obesity.
- Other eating disorders may include a combination of the signs and symptoms of anorexia, bulimia or binge eating, or may include different behaviors all together. For example, the act of repeatedly chewing food and spitting it out without swallowing may not be officially classified as an eating disorder, but it is an eating behavior that requires professional help.

Getting the right treatment

Counseling provided by a licensed health professional can address unhealthy eating and exercise behaviors, as well as any underlying influences that contribute to the behavior.

For treatment of physical symptoms, a health care professional with experience in eating disorders can treat the physical harm done, as well as provide a treatment plan with counseling and education.

Inpatient care, partial hospitalization or intensive outpatient residential care may be needed if the physical and psychological problems have become severe or life threatening.

In most cases, a combination of treatment methods is the most effective way to treat eating disorders. If you think you or someone you know may be struggling with an eating disorder, get help! Talk to a health care provider about what you can do to get back on track to eating healthy.

Helping understand and get treatment for an eating disorder is just one of the ways your EAP can help its members. For more information, call your confidential EAP any day, any time, for free assistance, resources or a referral to help resolve your concerns.

problem

solved