

Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating

What are eating disorders and disordered eating?

Eating disorders are mental health diagnoses. They're not a choice. Usually, there is a trigger—e.g., trauma, going on a diet, or a history of neglect—that initiates the onset of an eating disorder. In addition to triggering events, genetic factors like perfectionism and environmental factors like diet culture and toxic masculinity contribute to eating disorder development. Disordered eating includes some components of eating disorders, but without meeting diagnostic criteria.

What causes them?

Dieting is one trigger that can lead to disordered eating and eating disorders. In fact, the National Eating Disorders Association reports that 35 percent of “normal dieters” progress into disordered eating and as many as 25 percent advance to full-blown eating disorders.

College students are at high risk for disordered eating or eating disorders—especially if dieting. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, the average age of onset is 19 years old for anorexia nervosa, 20 years old for bulimia nervosa, and 25 years old for binge eating disorder. Research shows that 4.4 percent to 5.9 percent of teens entering college have a preexisting, untreated eating disorder.

Eating disorders don't discriminate. They occur among every ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, race, and sexuality. Social media impacts eating behaviors, and may be triggering for someone with EDs or DE. Research shows that use of Instagram, for instance, is linked to increased disordered eating symptoms.

What should I do if I or someone I know is struggling with them?

People struggling with eating disorders or disordered eating need to be referred to appropriate medical professionals. Getting help soon after onset is associated with higher recovery rates.

[Contact University Counseling Services](#)