

MODULE 2

MEDICAL COMPLICATIONS

Printable screenshots from the videos produced for canped.ca

WHY WORRY ABOUT EATING DISORDERS?

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

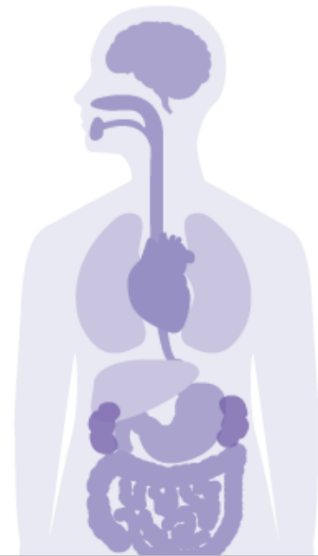
SERIOUS PROBLEMS THAT AFFECT
PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH
RELATIONSHIPS & PRODUCTIVITY

A FEW IMPORTANT POINTS

- The longer the eating disorder, the higher the chance of complications
- Tend to get stronger or more serious as time passes
 - Can develop irreversible medical complications
- Very important to get help as quickly as possible
- Helping a person with an eating disorder will take time

HOW AN EATING DISORDER AFFECTS THE BODY

1. Effects of starvation
2. Medical Risks Associated with Purging



EFFECTS OF STARVATION

A few concepts about weight loss

- Weight loss occurs when energy taken in is less than energy burned or used
 - Results in a negative energy balance
- Weight loss cannot be targeted to any specific body part
- Body loses weight everywhere, inside and out
 - Can affect vital organs
- Immediately the body will start to break down:
 - energy stores
 - fat stores
 - muscle stores

EFFECTS OF STARVATION

Brain

- Weight loss affects all of our organ systems, including our brain
- Brain loses weight as well
- Scans (e.g. CT scans) show an AN patient's brain is smaller
 - Brain loses weight, but the skull does not
 - Extra space increases the chance of injury
 - Body protects by increasing the amount of fluid around and within the brain
- Struggle with memory, mood, adaptability, and concentration
- May or may not be obvious early on in illness
 - As disease progresses, problems occur

Brain

- Changes the way and amount of time a person thinks about different things, including food
- Increases people's preoccupation with food
 - Extremely frequent thoughts
 - Intense thoughts
- Causes emotional distress, depression, anxiety, irritability, unstable moods, social withdrawal, and other serious issues
- Mental and physical health improve as nutritional intake improves
- Can be difficult to start eating again
- Malnourished brain is unable to accept new instructions to eat more

Skin & hair

- Starvation affects our skin and hair
- Dry skin and poor wound healing
- Brittle hair
- Shedding of hair
 - Not enough energy to support hair growth
- Hair loss can become more noticeable once treatment starts
 - Body wants to repair some of the damage by releasing the damaged and dead hair
- New hair can start to grow in new areas

Heart & circulation

- Causes heart to slow down to conserve energy
- As the heart rate slows, blood pressure may drop
 - Increase medical risks
 - Can cause potentially life-threatening issues
- Body will try to compensate to the best of its ability
- Quick changes in position can result in:
 - feeling light-headed
 - increased risk of fainting
- Can develop dangerous irregularities in heart beat

Heart & circulation

- An electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG) can help determine if the heart is beating normally
- Changes occur because the body is trying to cope with having less available energy
- Heart is beating less frequently and is in a weakened state
- Circulation to the skin is often poor, resulting in:
 - marbling appearance
 - abnormal bluish discoloration
 - sense of always feeling cold

Hormones

- Different hormones are affected by pronounced weight loss
- In females, starvation results in low levels of estrogen
 - Regular menstrual cycles generally stop
 - The first period's onset will often be delayed
- In males, levels of testosterone decrease
- Disruptions *affect multiple processes* within the body
- Starvation can impact growth and pubertal development



Hormones

IF AN ADOLESCENT **GOING THROUGH PUBERTY** **BEGINS TO LOSE WEIGHT OR FAILS TO GAIN WEIGHT** FOR **NORMAL GROWTH DEVELOPMENT CAN SLOW DOWN OR EVEN STOP**

NORMAL MATURATION & DEVELOPMENT CANNOT PROCEED UNTIL THE BODY IS RENOURISHED

Bones

- Adolescence is a critical time for healthy bone development
 - Normally bones become denser and stronger
- Nutrition is an important factor in bone health
- If a teen fails to develop and grow in a normal manner:
 - bones can become weaker and brittle
 - they can lose bone mass instead of gaining it
- Osteoporosis can occur as a result of:
 - low nutrition
 - low levels of estrogen in females
 - low levels of testosterone in males



Bones

- Bone strengthening slows once a teenager becomes an adult
- Bone changes are reversible with weight restoration and a return to normal hormone levels
- Patients may have osteoporosis when first assessed
 - Important to get help as soon as concerns arise and/or a diagnosis is made

MEDICAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH PURGING

RISKS OF PURGING

- Purging can refer to different symptoms, including:
 - self-induced vomiting
 - abuse of laxatives
 - abuse of diuretic pills (water pills)
 - abuse of diet pills
- Patients with the purging type of Anorexia Nervosa and those with Bulimia Nervosa purge to lose weight
- Because patients with BN are close to a healthy weight, they are less likely to experience the medical effects of starvation that patients with AN are also at risk for
- Purging may or may not occur after a binge
- Medical risks associated with purging depend on the method used

RISKS OF PURGING

Vomiting (Dehydration)

- Self-induced vomiting can cause medical complications
- Vomiting results in the loss of fluid from the body
- Electrolytes are lost
 - Low levels can cause serious problems, even death
- Level of water in the body decreases, dehydration occurs
 - Feeling unwell, lightheaded, or dizzy
 - Fainting can occur

Vomiting (Heart)

- Vomiting can also affect the heart
 - Loss of electrolytes can reduce levels of potassium
- Low potassium levels cause:
 - feeling unwell, weak, tired, and with leg cramps
 - risk of irregular heartbeat (arrhythmias)
- May require blood work or electrocardiogram
- May be started on potassium supplements
- In severe cases, may require hospitalization and an IV

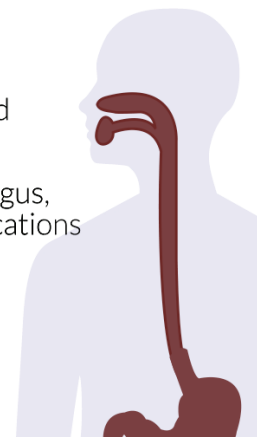


Vomiting (Teeth and oral cavity)

- Regular vomiting will affect the health of teeth and oral cavity
- Erodes tooth enamel
 - Hypersensitivity to temperature
 - Tooth decay (need for a root canal)
- Serious impact on overall health of teeth
 - May result in the need for teeth to be taken out
- Changes take time
 - Different factors influence how quickly problems arise

Vomiting (Teeth and oral cavity)

- Frequent vomiting causes the salivary glands in the cheeks to swell
- Mouth and tongue become dry, red and sore
- Lining of tube (esophagus) becomes red, inflamed and causes severe abdominal discomfort
- Acid from the stomach burns through the esophagus, resulting in life-threatening bleeding and complications



Laxatives & diuretics (Dehydration & Heart)

- Abuse of laxatives & diuretics is associated with medical risks
- Result in a loss of fluid from the body, increasing the risk of dehydration
- Puts patients at risk for unexpected fainting spells
- Electrolyte problems:
 - cramps
 - seizures
 - change in the level of consciousness
 - arrhythmias
- In rare cases, the effects can prove deadly

Purging can be addictive

- Once a person begins purging regularly:
 - often difficult to stop
 - will require the help of a trained therapist or doctor
- Hospitalization may be used to break the cycle of symptoms

If you have concerns that your son or daughter may be purging, it is important that you mention these concerns their healthcare provider