

Eating & Body-Image Disorders

Eating and Body-Image Disorders are serious but treatable mental and physical illnesses affecting people of all genders, ages, races, and body shapes. These illnesses are related to how people think about food, eating, weight, and shape. People don't choose them and they can be invisible.

Research reveals that social media use leads to body image concerns and eating disorders. A full 50% of adolescents themselves say social media makes them feel worse about themselves.



Types of Eating Disorders

Anorexia: Marked by food restriction and/or “getting rid” of food/calories by vomiting, exercising, laxatives, etc. It is the most fatal of all eating disorders; common causes of death are heart failure and suicide.

Bulimia: Binging then “purging” by vomiting and/or using laxatives.

Orthorexia: “Obsessive” healthy eating that can lead to dysfunction.

Disordered eating: May include symptoms and behaviors of eating disorders/restrictive eating,

compulsive eating, inflexible eating patterns, or use of drugs like Ozempic. A growing issue with boys around muscle dysmorphia or “bigorexia.”

What leads people to develop eating disorders?

- Comparison culture on social media
- Bullying: Body size is the number one reason for bullying in school
- Diet culture
- Trauma and desire for control

28.8 million Americans will be diagnosed with an eating disorder in their lifetime.
Approximately 6-8% of adolescents have an eating disorder.

— National Eating Disorder Association

In the last decade, there was over **100% rise** in children under 12 being diagnosed with eating disorders.

— Johns Hopkins

10,000 deaths per year in the US are caused by eating disorders. That's one death every 52 minutes.

— National Association for Anorexia Nervosa

77% of adolescents experience body image distress.

— Milton et al 2021

Scan for full kit and more resources on each topic's tab



Online Harms Prevention Action Kit
fairplayforkids.org/onlineharmskit



▶ Protect Your Child

“Parental influence and a supportive school environment play a large role in prevention of body dissatisfaction and eating problems coming from social media exposure.” **Burnett et al, 2017**

Delay smartphones/social media as long as possible.

It is an option to not to give your child an internet-connected device or social media. Some families find this easier than policing time and content on devices. Text-and-call only phones are an alternative.

If you have already given your child/teen a smartphone, you can still transition back to a basic phone or no phone (see tips [here](#)). If your child exhibits significant phone dependency, seek support from a mental health professional. [Reset Your Child's Brain](#) outlines a detailed plan.

Get educated about eating disorders. Curated and unrealistic portrayals of beauty and fitness online can pave the way for negative self-comparisons, low self-esteem, and disordered eating behaviors for both males and females.

Have frequent and ongoing conversations with your children about how the media portrays unrealistic body ideals with filters, camera angles, Photoshop, and AI-generated models.

Encourage taking social media breaks. Model the behavior yourself!

Share that searching “healthy lifestyles” can lead to seeing content about eating restrictions, excessive exercise, and body ideals.

Encourage mindful eating vs restrictive or “fad diets”.

Discuss shifting the focus from our body as an ornament to an instrument for our own use (focus on what bodies do for us instead of appearance).

▶ Start a Conversation

Ask your kids:

Why do you think some teens develop eating disorders? ”

How do you feel when you see unreal body ideals on social media? ”

What filters are used to create unrealistic images? ”

Are your friends influenced by these images? ”

Do you think being an athlete in certain sports puts people at higher risk of developing eating disorders? ”

Have you seen pro-eating disorder content online? What do you do when that happens? ”

▶ Take Action if you suspect your child is struggling with body image or eating disorders

- Look for signs that your child may be struggling — fixation on losing weight, excessive exercise, significant muscle growth (for boys), mood changes, or severe and sudden weight loss ([click here for more](#)).
- Be prepared to describe what you are noticing using “I” statements.
- Gently ask questions and listen nonjudgmentally.
- Get informed about eating disorders and seek professional help. Early intervention is critically important for those suffering from an eating disorder!
- Visit www.nationaleatingdisorders.org for more info.