

# Anorexia Nervosa

It's Time to Talk about It.

**Anorexia nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss.**

## Did You Know...

Anorexia nervosa typically appears in early to mid-adolescence.

Anorexia nervosa has the highest premature fatality rate of any mental illness.

Recovery is possible, help is available.

## Primary Symptoms

- Resistance to maintaining body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height.
- Intense fear of weight gain or being “fat,” even though underweight.
- Disturbance in the experience of body weight or shape, undue influence of weight or shape on self-evaluation, or denial of the seriousness of low body weight.
- Loss of menstrual periods in girls and women post-puberty.

## Know the Warning Signs

- Dramatic weight loss.
- Preoccupation with weight, food, calories, fat grams, and dieting.
- Refusal to eat certain foods, progressing to restrictions against whole categories of food (e.g. no carbohydrates, etc.).
- Frequent comments about feeling “fat” or overweight despite weight loss.
- Anxiety about gaining weight or being “fat.”
- Denial of hunger.
- Development of food rituals (e.g. eating foods in certain orders, excessive chewing, rearranging food on a plate).
- Consistent excuses to avoid mealtimes or situations involving food.
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimen--despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury, the need to “burn off” calories taken in.
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities.

## Health Consequences

- Abnormally slow heart rate and low blood pressure, which mean that the heart muscle is changing. The risk for heart failure rises as heart rate and blood pressure levels sink lower and lower.
- Reduction of bone density (osteoporosis), which results in dry, brittle bones.
- Muscle loss and weakness.
- Severe dehydration, which can result in kidney failure.
- Fainting, fatigue, and overall weakness.
- Dry hair and skin, hair loss is common.
- Growth of a downy layer of hair called lanugo all over the body, including the face, in an effort to keep the body warm.

**Recovery is possible, help is available.** If you are concerned about yourself or a friend, you can get more information and treatment referrals by calling the NEDA Helpline and visiting the NEDA Website, [www.NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://www.NationalEatingDisorders.org).

