

Eating disorders are life-threatening

Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are the two major forms of eating disorders. Both are characterised by over attention on diet, weight and body shape, intense fear of becoming fat and the dependence of self-confidence on body weight and shape.

Such disorders are life-threatening. Patients with anorexia nervosa are often underweight, are at least 15% below the normal body weight for their age and height. They control their weight mainly through restricting food intake. Victims of bulimia nervosa, on the other hand, eat a lot but later disgorge the food through self-induced vomiting. They get trapped in a vicious cycle of dieting, bingeing and then purging. They also over-exercise, and misuse laxatives and diuretics to keep slim.

This disorder mostly afflicts young females. Anorexia nervosa usually affects girls in their early adolescent lives, while bulimia nervosa typically occurs during their late adolescence or early adulthood.

The causes of eating disorders are many. Genetic influences, abnormal serotonin level, personality traits such as chasing perfection and low self-esteem, psychological problems including fear of growing up, negative emotions, preoccupation with looking slim and family dysfunction -- all play a part in the development of eating disorders.

Eating disorders are serious psychiatric disorders that require prompt professional help. If you notice someone showing drastic weight loss or fluctuating weight; showing excessive concern about his or her weight, going on an abnormally strict diet despite being already very thin; looking depressed, or always making excuses to avoid dining with others, or adopting peculiar eating habits such as eating extremely slowly, cutting their food into very small pieces, and spending a long time in the bathroom after meals (probably engaged in self-induced vomiting), show concern and care for him or her and encourage them to seek professional help.