

# ANOREXIA NERVOSA

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## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A psychological disorder in which a person refuses to eat adequately in spite of hunger and loses enough weight to become emaciated. The illness usually begins with a normal weight-loss diet. The person eats very little and refuses to stop dieting after a reasonable weight loss. The person's body perception is distorted; the person continues to feel fat—even when emaciated.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Weight loss of at least 15% of body weight without physical illness.
- High energy level despite body wasting.
- Intense fear of obesity.
- Depression.
- Appetite loss.
- Constipation.
- Cold intolerance.
- Refusal to maintain a minimum standard weight for age and height.
- Distorted body image. The person continues to feel fat even when emaciated.
- Cessation of menstrual periods.

### CAUSES

Unknown. Possible causes include family and internal conflicts (sexual conflicts); phobia about putting on weight; changes in fashion in U.S. (slimness is identified with beauty); a symptom of depression or personality disorder.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Peer or social pressure to be thin.
- History of slight overweight.
- Perfectionistic, compulsive or overachieving personality.
- Psychological stress.
- Being an athlete, ballet dancer, cheerleader or model.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Confront personal problems realistically. Try to correct or cope with problems with the help of counselors, therapists, family and friends.
- Develop a realistic attitude about weight.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Treatable if the patient recognizes the emotional disturbance, wants help and cooperates in treatment.
- Without treatment, this can cause permanent disability or even death. Persons with anorexia nervosa have a high rate of attempted suicide due to low self-esteem.
- Therapy may continue over several years. Relapses are common, especially when stressful situations occur.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Chronic anorexia nervosa caused by patient's resistance to treatment.
- Electrolyte disturbances or irregular heartbeat. These may be life-threatening.
- Osteoporosis.
- Suicide.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURE

- The goal of treatment is for the patient to establish healthy eating patterns to regain normal weight. The patient can accomplish this with behavior-modification training supervised by a qualified professional.
- For additional information, contact Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, PO Box 5102, Eugene, OR 97405; (503) 344-1144

### MEDICATIONS

A variety of psychotherapy medications have some benefit, but there is no one medication that is consistently useful.

### ACTIVITY

No restrictions, but avoid overexertion or compulsive exercise to lose weight

### DIET

- A controlled refeeding program will be established.
- Vitamin and mineral supplements may be prescribed.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Life-threatening symptoms occur, including rapid, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, or loss of consciousness. Call immediately. This is an emergency!
- You have symptoms of anorexia nervosa or observe them in a family member.
- Weight loss continues, despite treatment.