Body Image & Eating Disorders

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Messages about Food

What messages have you received (from parents, peers, media, etc.) about food?

How are messages about food different for women and men?
Some statistics

- Eating disorders have increased threefold in the last 50 years
- 10% of the population is afflicted with an eating disorder
- 90% of the cases are young women and adolescent girls
- Up to 21% of college women show sub-threshold symptoms
- 61% of college women show some sort of eating pathology
What is an Eating Disorder?

- **Eating Disorder** – any psychological disorder characterized by abnormal eating habits.
Three Types of Eating Disorders

- **Anorexia nervosa** - characterized by a pursuit of thinness that leads to self-starvation.
- **Bulimia nervosa** - characterized by a cycle of bingeing followed by purging.
- **Binge-eating** - characterized by a pattern of uncontrollable eating where a person rapidly consumes an excessive amount of food.
Vocabulary

- **Starvation** - is a severe deficiency in caloric energy, nutrient and vitamin intake
- **Purging** - to rid the stomach of food; to vomit.
Anorexia Nervosa

- Begins with individuals restricting certain foods, not unlike someone who is dieting
  - Restrict high-fat foods first
  - Food intake becomes severely limited
More on anorexia nervosa

- May exhibit unusual behaviors with regards to food.
  - preoccupied with thoughts of food, and may show obsessive-compulsive tendencies related to food
  - may adopt ritualistic behaviors at mealtime.
  - may collect recipes or prepare elaborate meals for others.
Bulimia Nervosa

- Characterized by binge eating
  A binge may or may not be planned marked by a feeling of being out of control

- The binge generally lasts until the individual is uncomfortably or painfully full
Bulimia Nervosa

- Common triggers for a binge
  - Anxiety
  - Stress
  - Intense hunger after a period of intense dieting or fasting
  - Feelings related to weight, body shape, and food are common triggers to binge eating
Bulimia Nervosa

- Feelings of being ashamed after a binge are common
  - behavior is kept a secret

- Tend to adhere to a pattern of restricted caloric intake
  - usually prefer low-calorie foods during times between binges
More on bulimia nervosa

- Later age at the onset of the disorder
- Are able to maintain a normal weight
- Will not seek treatment until they are ready
  - Most deal with the burden of hiding their problem for many years, sometimes well into their 30’s
Anorexia affects your whole body

Brain and Nerves
can't think right, fear of gaining weight, sad, moody, irritable, bad memory, fainting, changes in brain chemistry

Hair
hair thins and gets brittle

Heart
low blood pressure, slow heart rate, fluttering of the heart (palpitations), heart failure

Blood
anemia and other blood problems

Muscles and Joints
weak muscles, swollen joints, fractures, osteoporosis

Kidneys
kidney stones, kidney failure

Body Fluids
low potassium, magnesium, and sodium

Intestines
constipation, bloating

Hormones
periods stop, bone loss, problems growing, trouble getting pregnant, if pregnant, higher risk for miscarriage, having a C-section, baby with low birthweight, and post partum depression.

Skin
bruise easily, dry skin, growth of fine hair all over body, get cold easily, yellow skin, nails get brittle

How bulimia affects your body

Brain
depression, fear of gaining weight, anxiety, dizziness, shame, low self-esteem

Cheeks
swelling, soreness

Mouth
cavities, tooth enamel erosion, gum disease, teeth sensitive to hot and cold foods

Throat & Esophagus
sore, irritated, can tear and rupture, blood in vomit

Muscles
fatigue

Stomach
ulcers, pain, can rupture, delayed emptying

Skin
abrasion of knuckles, dry skin

Blood
anemia

Heart
irregular heart beat, heart muscle weakened, heart failure, low pulse and blood pressure

Body Fluids
dehydration, low potassium, magnesium, and sodium

Intestines
constipation, irregular bowel movements (BM), bloating, diarrhea, abdominal cramping

Hormones
Irregular or absent period
Anorexia

Risk of Death:
The Deadliest of all Psychological Disorders
Risk Factors for developing an eating disorder

- Personality/psychological factors
- Family influence
- Media
- Subcultures existing within our society
Personality/Psychological Factors

- Sense of self worth based on weight
- Use food as a means to feel in control
- Rigid thinking
- Perfectionism
- Poor impulse control
- Inadequate coping skills
Protective personality
Factors

- Nonconformity
- High self-esteem
- Belief that body weight and shape are out of one’s control
- Self-perception of being thin
Media and Cultural Factors

- Can be seen as a way to become more popular.
- Belief that being thin is the answer to all problems is prevalent in western culture.
Media and Cultural Factors

- Bulimia can be influenced by social norms
  - It can be seen as a behavior, which is learned through modeling

- Women who are seen as being attractive by societies standards can be very susceptible to eating disorders as well
Media and Cultural Factors

- Media images are inescapable
  - devastating when we see idealized images in the media and feel they do not meet the expectations of our society

- Frequent readers of fashion magazines are two to three times more likely than infrequent readers to be dieting
Historical Beauty Ideals
The Unreal Ideal

- http://demo.fb.se/e/girlpower/retouch/retouch/
The Thin-Ideal

- The avg. model weighs 23% less than the avg. American woman
- Longitudinal study from 1979-1988 showed that 69% of playboy models and 60% of Miss America contestants met weight criteria for anorexia
- Women’s bodies in the media have become increasingly thinner
The Impact on Women

- One study showed that 55% of college women thought that they were overweight though only 6% were.

- 94% of one sample of women wanted to be smaller than they currently were.

- 96% thought that they were larger than the current societal ideal.

- Half the women in a study said they would rather be hit by a truck than be fat.
Challenges to treatment

• Lack of motivation to change
  • reinforced by the weight loss, because it feels good to them
  • may deny the existence of the problem, or the severity of it

Lack of insight

• Not really about food.