

Danna's Story

A Journey Through an Eating Disorder

by Danna Keck

What is an Eating Disorder?

Taken from www.NationalEatingDisorders.org:

"Eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder include extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding weight and food issues. They are serious emotional and physical problems that can have life-threatening consequences for females and males."

Anorexia Nervosa

Characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss.

Bulimia Nervosa

Characterized by binge eating followed by purging. Can include eating large amounts of food in short periods of time, followed by vomiting, laxative abuse, or over-exercising.

Binge Eating Disorder (also known as Compulsive Overeating)

Characterized by periods of uncontrolled, impulsive, or continuous eating to the point of feeling uncomfortably full. There is no purging, but there may be occasional fasts or diets, and feelings of shame and self-hatred.

Statistics

From www.NationalEatingDisorders.org:

- In the United States, as many as 10 million females and 1 million males are fighting a battle with an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia.
- The mortality rate for females between 15 and 24 who suffer from anorexia nervosa, is twelve times higher than the death rate of ALL other causes of death.
- Anorexia nervosa has the highest premature fatality rate of any mental illness.
- Over one-half of teenage girls and one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives.
- Girls who diet frequently are 12 times as likely to binge as girls who don't diet.

From www.eatingdisorderinfo.org:

- 1 in 5 women struggle with an eating disorder or disordered eating.
- An estimated 10 to 15% of people with anorexia or bulimia are male.
- 90% of those who have eating disorders are women between the ages of 12 and 25.
- At least 50,000 individuals will die as a direct result of an eating disorder.
- It is estimated that currently 11% of high school students have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.

Causes of Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are often about much more than food. There are deeply complex issues that can lead to an eating disorder. While researchers are still learning about the underlying causes, they do know some of the general issues that can lead to the development of an eating disorder. For many people, it's about feeling in control in an overwhelming world. Here are some other factors that can contribute to eating disorders:

- Low self-esteem
- Feeling inadequate
- Feeling of a lack of control in life
- Depression, anxiety, anger, or loneliness
- Troubled family and personal relationships
- Difficulty expressing emotions
- History of physical or sexual abuse
- History of being teased for weight or size
- A society that glorifies thinness and physical appearance.

What to Look For

Watch for personality types

- Perfectionist
- People pleaser
- Over achiever

Watch for outward signs

- Change in skin color (yellow skin tint)
- Hair loss
- Excessive hair growth on arms and legs
- Frequently being cold
- Brittle nails
- Fatigue

Emotional and behavioral symptoms

- Refusal to eat
- Denial of hunger
- Excessive exercise
- Lack of emotion
- Wearing baggy or layered clothing
- Complaining about being fat

These are just a few of many signs and symptoms. I cannot stress enough the importance of educating yourself on these books and websites. They hold such valuable information. And once you have targeted the signs, the best thing you can do is be there for them and let them know that you have seen something that has changed in them. All you have to do is help them begin their journey, because many times the individual is just longing for someone to reach out to them.

Resources*

Websites

- www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
- <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.com>

Books

- 100 Questions and Answers About Anorexia
By: Sari Fine Shepphird
- When your child has an eating disorder
By: Abigail H. Natenshon
- Eating Disorders for Dummies
By: Susan Schulherr, LCSW

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