

# Natural Help 4...

# Eating Disorders



## What are Eating Disorders?

Eating Disorders are a growing concern in today's society and have been on the increase over the last few decades. Some **causes of eating disorders** are associated with the "ideal skinny figure" promoted by fashion and the media. In the end many people strive for modern culture's thin ideal. When these factors are coupled with **unhealthy and unrealistic weight goals, a dangerous fear of gaining weight**, can follow. While eating disorders do involve obsessive behaviors regarding food intake and body-image, they are often deeply rooted in emotional issues of control, self-esteem and self-criticism. Affecting mostly women, Eating Disorders can result in serious health problems and even death if not treated. The various eating Disorders include:

- Anorexia nervosa
- Bulimia nervosa
- Binge-eating
- Obesity (although not formally recognized as an eating disorder)

## Diagnosing Eating Disorders

Should you seek professional help for you or your child, a battery of tests will be done by a health care professional before a diagnosis is made. This will include a full psychological as well as physical examination, with possible blood tests and urine analysis. Your doctor will be checking for **confirmation of an eating disorder**, as well as checking for damage or complications caused by the disorder, such as kidney problems or electrolyte abnormalities. You will be referred to a psychologist who will take a full psychological history, discuss **feelings and attitudes towards food and body-image** and examine **eating, purging and exercising habits and rituals**.

## What Causes Eating Disorders?

There are many different causes of eating disorders. Sometimes it is a series of factors acting together.

### Common Causes Associated with Eating Disorders

- Genetics – Research suggests that people with an Anorexic family member are approximately 4 times more likely to develop Anorexia than the general population. While this may suggest that there is a genetic component to the disorder, it may also be attributed to the shared experiences and learnt behaviors within the family. It is also likely that the **personality traits related to Anorexia such as perfectionism, emotional sensitivity**

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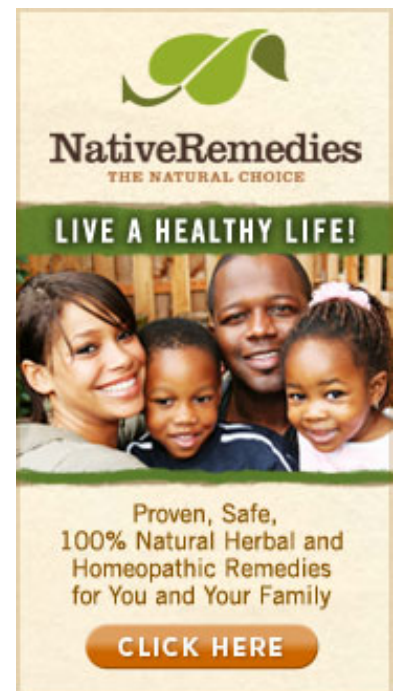
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**and perseverance** are inherited rather than the disorder itself.

- Family and Learned Behavior –As mentioned, learned behavior may contribute to an increased risk of developing Anorexia. Parents who place great importance on physical appearances, criticize their child’s body shape, or who are dieting themselves, are more likely to have a child that will develop an eating disorder. In many cases, it is young girls from families that “bottle-up” emotions and avoid conflict at all cost that develop Anorexia.
- Culture and The Media – Western society places great emphasis on body aesthetic. Women are under scrutiny far more than men in this regard. Society is influenced by the media – a force which is instrumental in shaping ideals. Fashion dictates what is seen as ‘attractive’ and most fashion houses favor a pre-pubescent figure for women. When girls start to fill out into their rounder womanly figures, they are often met with criticism and become self-conscious. To further complicate things, the media such as TV programs and magazines often give men and women **unrealistic expectations of what the body should look like** - often displaying below-weight models and actresses. This can lead to a false idea of what is ‘normal’. Furthermore, many young men come to expect this standard too and so women may find themselves constantly **striving to live up to skewed expectations**.
- Restrictive eating – Studies have shown that **causes of eating disorders include dieting and restrictive eating which can lead to obsessions about food**. This may trigger Anorexia or lead to over-eating. Peer groups can have a large influence, especially for teenage girls, as thinness is idealized and diets become fashionable. The media also encourages dieting, with the slimming industry bringing in huge amounts of revenue worldwide every year.



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**Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist**



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

## Help for Eating Disorders

Getting help as early as possible is important when **dealing with eating disorders**. Treatments often involve psychotherapy, counseling and consultations with a nutritionist, who will help restore healthy eating patterns and food behavior. Prescription medications or natural remedies may also be recommended to calm the mind, treat underlying problems such as depression and stop the habitual, destructive behavior. The best approach to combating any eating disorder is a holistic one that incorporates various treatment options as well as healthy lifestyle changes such as daily exercise, a balanced diet and new constructive ways of dealing with negative emotions.

**Natural herbal and homeopathic remedies** can be combined with other eating disorder treatments to help restore peace to the mind, **treat underlying depression, balance serotonin levels and reduce anxiety** during the healing process. Certain herbs that often complement eating disorder treatments include Passiflora Incarnata, Hypericum perforatum (St John’s Wort) , Melissa Officinalis (Lemon Balm), Lavender and Passiflora Incarnata. Once the emotional root of the eating disorder is discovered, herbal remedies can be very beneficial taken alongside healthy eating and exercise programs and the appropriate eating disorder treatments to help the individual achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

## What are the Health Effects of Eating Disorders?

Inadequate amounts of food result in malnutrition, which adversely affects all the body's organs. Many individuals with [eating disorders](#) **seriously damage their vital body systems, such as the heart and kidneys**, often permanently. Women with Anorexia Nervosa commonly experience loss of menstruation (amenorrhea) and reproductive organs and functioning can be compromised. **Anorexia and Bulimia can have serious medical complications and severe symptoms** as the effects of self-starvation and purging take a serious toll on the body's health. Some of the many consequences of eating disorders include:

- Loss of menstruation (amenorrhea)
- Dry skin and brittle nails
- Brittle and thinning hair
- Sensitivity or intolerance to cold temperatures
- Cardiovascular problems such as chronically low blood pressure and heart rate, palpitations, and in extreme cases, heart failure
- Electrolyte imbalances: low potassium, sodium and magnesium
- Kidney stones or kidney failure
- Changes in brain chemistry often resulting in depression
- Lowered [immune system](#) function
- Constipation and bloating
- Headaches due to malnutrition
- In severe cases nerve damage can present, such as numbness or mild paralysis in the feet or legs

## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is 'better' than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called 'alternative' or 'complimentary' medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of

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medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term 'holistic' medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are 'unproven' and 'untested', the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market –giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called 'standardized' extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While 'standardized' extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.



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Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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