Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

HEALTH LINK

Eating Disorders

Millions of teens are on weight-reducing diets. Although maintaining a healthy body weight is important, *obsessive* dieting can lead to eating disorders. Eating disorders can disrupt lives and sometimes even result in death.

Starving Oneself

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder in which people starve themselves. Anorexics have an irrational fear of becoming fat and see themselves as much heavier than they really are. They shun food and may exercise for hours every day in an attempt to lose weight.

Female anorexics may never mature sexually or may stop menstruating because they lose too much body fat, causing the level of sex hormones to fall. Their body temperature and pulse rate become abnormally low; their hair becomes thin and dry; and their resistance to infection drops.

Bingeing and Purging

Patients with bulimia engage in frequent episodes of bingeing (eating a large amount of food in a short time). After a binge, they almost always purge by self-induced vomiting or by using laxatives. Therefore, their weight stays fairly constant. Unlike anorexic patients, bulimics often recognize that their behavior is abnormal and often feel guilty, depressed, and helpless.

The frequent purging removes salts from the body, which can eventually lead to muscle weakness, heart failure, and kidney disease. The vomiting gradually destroys tooth enamel and results in unhealthy gums.

Help for People with Eating Disorders

Little is known about what causes anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Many people believe that western society's emphasis on thinness in women is largely to blame. However, recent research suggests that genetic factors might also be involved. Both eating disorders can be managed with a combination of medical treatment, counseling, and family support.

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