

Teen Health Kit for Parents

✓ Eating Disorder Warning Signs

Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, are devastating illnesses for both the affected individuals and their families. More than seven million women suffer from eating disorders. These illnesses are most common among girls ages 12 to 25 but can occur in younger and older women, in boys and men, as well. Untreated, eating disorders can lead to serious lifelong health problems and death. Because not all health care professionals are trained to treat eating disorders, ask your health care professional for a referral to a specialist if your teen exhibits any of these behaviors or symptoms:

- Intense fear of weight gain even though underweight
- Refusal to maintain an appropriate weight for height
- Anxiety around mealtimes
- Strange behavior around meals, including moving food around on the plate without eating it and hiding food
- Unrealistic or distorted body image, such as feeling overweight when underweight
- Missed menstrual periods
- Withdrawing emotionally from people and avoiding social activities that involve food
- Eating large amounts of food in one sitting (bingeing), then getting rid of it by vomiting or abusing laxatives (purging)
- Disappearing into the bathroom after meals for protracted periods of time
- Excessive exercising

Parents can do a lot to discourage unhealthy eating behaviors and encourage positive body images among their teens. Try these approaches:

1. Explain that it's healthy and normal to gain some weight and experience other physical changes during adolescence.
2. Don't criticize your teen's weight.
3. Talk about the idealized physical images of men and women portrayed by the media and how they're unrealistic for most people.
4. Explain why a growing body needs a balanced diet.
5. Model healthy attitudes about your own body.

Sources: *American Psychiatric Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders and the Harvard Eating Disorders Center*

Local Resources:

Livingston County Mental Health Services
4600 Millennium Drive
Geneseo, NY 14454
(585) 243-7250
www.co.livingston.state.ny.us/community_svcs.htm

Genesee Valley Health Partnership, Inc.
Healthy Communities
that Care
(585) 748-5146
www.gvhp.org

Useful Web sites:

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

**Nat'l Assoc. of Anorexia Nervosa
and Associated Disorders**
www.anad.org



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