Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia Nervosa, or "loss of appetite due to nerves", is actually the denial or suppression of appetite, which results in self-starvation. It is a psychological disorder that can lead to a physically life-threatening situation.



If you suspect that you or a loved one is suffering with anorexia nervosa, it is essential to get professional help. There are a number of support options and treatments available to help you recover and regain a healthy lifestyle, physically, mentally and emotionally.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Professional care is necessary to treat the disorder and counselling may also be recommended for other family members. Remember that when treated early enough, a return to normal health is likely together with regained self-confidence and a realistic body image. Here are some tips to get you started:

Characteristics of an individual with anorexia nervosa:

- An obsession with being thin.
- Use of laxatives, diuretic medications and even intentional vomiting after meals.
- Refusal to eat or eating only a few morsels, despite drastic weight loss.
- Girls and women aged 12-25 are the most typical sufferers.
- Victims may lose up to 25 per cent of their original body weight.
- Although the victim may appear to be a stable young adult to the outer world, there is often a family history of psychological insecurity and highly self-critical perfectionism.

Causes

- Although there are no absolute proven causes, anorexia nervosa unquestionably has a strong psychological component.
- Social pressure to be thin contributes to the development of the condition.
- Feelings of guilt, depression and anxiety about not conforming to these beliefs only add to the problem.
- The condition may begin with dieting, which accompanies a major life change such as moving, puberty or the loss of a loved one.
- If the above dieting is successful, the victim begins to feel in control of their life again.

© 2026 Morneau Shepell Ltd.

- To make the dieting even more successful and increase feelings of control, the victim may begin to exercise excessively.
- Internal control becomes a substitute because the victim feels helpless over external situations. The fear of losing control then becomes transferred to a fear of gaining weight.

Dangers

- Permanent physiological damage can take place from anorexia nervosa, including damage to the heart, kidneys and brain.
- If untreated, the condition can lead to death.
- Self-esteem, depression and feelings of guilt will continue to build unless treatment is started.
- It is essential not to self-diagnose any eating disorder—see a health professional if you have any concerns at all.

Treatment and Recovery

- Anorexia nervosa can have complicated origins—recovery usually requires identification of likely causes in order to find appropriate treatment.
- Counselling is often extended to other family members.
- Recovery may require observation or treatment of physical damage resulting from the harmful effects of the disorder along with psychological therapy.

Anorexia is a serious illness and should be treated immediately. Sufferers of this emotional disorder should seek help or be encouraged to do so. This article is not intended to replace professional consultation and a medical professional should be contacted to discuss any concerns.