

Eating Disorder Symptoms in Children & Teens

Eating disorders in children and teens can often present initially as a seemingly harmless interest in physical fitness, healthy eating or attempts to control weight. Unfortunately, in children who are at-risk for the development of an eating disorder, mild behaviors can quickly escalate into problematic eating patterns and a clinically significant eating disorder. Furthermore, eating disorders affect kids of all sizes so you cannot tell by looking at someone whether they have an eating disorder or not, and even young kids are often able to hide their eating disorder behaviors from those around them. That is why it's important to be familiar with the warning signs that your child or family member could be struggling with [anorexia](#), [bulimia](#), [binge eating](#), or another serious eating disorder.

The following is a list of symptoms or red flags that may warrant further assessment by a trained medical professional:

- **Unexplained changes in growth patterns or development**
 - Weight gain that is inconsistent with the child's standard growth chart
 - Weight loss
 - Weight plateau (child does not make expected gains in weight, despite growing taller)
 - Delayed onset of menstruation/puberty
- **Significant changes in eating patterns & behaviors**
 - Increasingly "picky eating"
 - Erratic or inconsistent eating; periods of restriction followed by overindulgence
 - Attempts to become a vegetarian/vegan
 - Cutting food into very small pieces, not letting foods touch, taking abnormally small bites of food
 - Eating unusual concoctions or mixtures of food; inappropriate use of condiments
 - Moving food around a plate or hiding food to make it appear as though he/she has eaten more
 - Hiding or hoarding food
 - Any evidence of self-induced vomiting
- **Dieting Behaviors and Negative Body Image Thoughts**
 - Increasingly fixated on "healthy" eating
 - Keeping food diaries or logging intake via a smartphone app
 - Cutting out entire food categories ex) refuses sweets/desserts, no carbohydrates, etc.
 - Increasing worry or preoccupation with food/meals
 - Increasing interest in calorie counting and fat content in foods
 - Self-Depreciating comments related to weight/body
 - Fear of becoming fat
 - Excessive or compulsive exercise
 - Frequent weighing
- **Social Changes & Activities of Daily Living**
 - Getting dressed, going clothes shopping, ordering meals at restaurants or choosing food the grocery store become increasingly difficult and anxiety provoking; may result in power struggles with parents
 - Misses family meals and often reports that she/he has already eaten at a friend's house
 - Has difficulty eating in front of other people; often takes food to bedroom to eat in private
 - Becomes more isolated, misses out on activities with friends or family

Read more about signs, symptoms and other eating disorder information at eatingdisorder.org.