

Eating Disorders

Once you begin to become dissatisfied with your body and self-image, it can be easy to fall into cycles of unhealthy eating habits. At some point you may be willing to pay any price to feel good about the way you look.

When facing this issue head on, a crucial thing to remember is that God designed you with a purpose. The media has always spewed out warped ideals of what it means to be a man or a woman. But God loves you and wants you to live in freedom, the way He created you. The Bible says, in Psalm 139, that you were “**fearfully and wonderfully made.**” Every part of you was intentionally formed by your Creator. Understanding your identity in who God made you to be is the first step towards healing.

One of the core values of Ignite Church is that you can't do life alone. You were meant to live and function within a safe, loving community. If you are dealing with this on your own, please tell someone who can help you. This may be one of the most difficult steps for you to take, but it is the most important. Keeping your struggles a secret is the surest way of allowing it to take over your life completely. You are surrounded by people who love you and want God's best for you.

Do not be afraid to consult professional help as well. Some problems can't be resolved without doctoral care. Because eating disorders are often associated with physical complications, it is important to schedule an appointment with a medical doctor as soon as possible. Meeting with a nutritionist can also help you develop healthy eating patterns.

And, no matter what, don't give up. Overcoming an eating disorder takes time. People who have gone through this struggle will tell you that it can sometimes take years to get on the other side of it. Set small goals you can reach in a short time to keep yourself encouraged, and keep setting goals you can attain. Don't let setbacks or obstacles in your path demoralize you. It's important to keep going, and others will help you through that process. You will not be alone.

MAIN TYPES OF EATING DISORDERS

If there is someone close to you who struggles with an eating disorder, here is a reference guide to help you better understand the diagnosis and symptoms of what they may be going through:

1. Anorexia nervosa: People with this eating disorder never feel thin enough. They excessively diet, often to the point of starvation, and see themselves as “fat,” even when underweight.

Symptoms:

- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Low self-esteem
- Fear of eating in public and preoccupation with food
- Physical problems: Menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation abdominal pain, irregular heart rhythms, low blood pressure and dehydration

2. Bulimia nervosa: In this case, people endure cycles of extreme overeating, called bingeing, and purging (most commonly through vomiting). As with anorexia, people with this disorder see themselves as “fat.” However, unlike with anorexia, they typically have a normal weight.

Symptoms:

- Self-induced vomiting and/or excessive laxative use; excessive exercise
 - Feeling a loss of control and low self-esteem
 - Going to the bathroom after eating or during meals
 - Physical problems: Abnormal bowel function, sores in the throat and mouth, dehydration, irregular heartbeat, sores on the knuckles or hands due to vomiting, menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation, and substance abuse

Risk Factors For Eating Disorders

- Female: Teenage girls and young women have a greater risk of having an eating disorder
- Age: While eating disorders can affect anyone, they are more common in teens & early 20's
- Family History: People with parents/siblings who had an eating disorder are at increased risk
- Mental Health Linkage: Depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder are highly linked to eating disorders
- Complications: Eating disorders can lead to other complications, including heart problems and digestive problems, and can, in some cases, be life-threatening