

## Anorexia

Anorexia sufferers starve themselves, and have a terror of gaining weight. Sufferers frequently have a distorted perception of their shape and weight (dysmorphia) and will continue to think they are overweight even after they become extremely thin, and are very ill or near death.

The behavioural symptoms of an anorexic include mood swings, restlessness and hyperactivity. Often the anorexic develops eating habits such as refusing to eat in front of other people, frequently claiming they have already eaten when offered food, becoming excessively fastidious about what they will and will not eat, and becoming very secretive and defensive around food. Anorexics may start to wear baggy clothes to avoid the extent their weight loss becomes apparent to others, and will become more and more isolated and withdrawn from friends and family.

Food and eating comes to dominate the life of a person with anorexia. Anorexics think obsessively and continually about food as their bodies are in starvation. Weight loss is often accelerated by excessive dieting, exercise and other extreme methods such as the abuse of laxatives.

There are many serious medical risks associated with anorexia. They include shrunken bones, mineral loss, low body temperature, irregular heartbeat, permanent failure of normal growth and development of osteoporosis. Other effects of anorexia are constipation and abdominal pain, dizzy spells and feeling faint, a bloated stomach, puffy face, poor blood circulation and feeling cold. Laxative abuse is extremely harmful to the body: it can wear out the bowel muscle and causes it to decrease in function. But rarely is anorexia about the food. Of course we

need to inspire healthy eating in someone suffering from anorexia, but weight gain is rarely a sustainable answer.

A person with anorexia will usually use their eating disorder as a way of coping with painful feelings of anger, shame, guilt, fear and self loathing, and to experience a sense of control which is absent in their life except in the case of food. This sense of control is potent to the anorexic who finds a profound pleasure in 'not needing'. But this sense of control is however an illusion, and the eating disorder soon takes complete control of the sufferer. Anorexia is used as a way for a person to feel better about themselves, but it is a 'quick fix' and a false answer to underlying self loathing; the reality is one of greater, not less, emotional pain and isolation, not to mention the physical effects of anorexia, which, left untreated, can be fatal.

Anorexics attract exactly the kind of attention that allows their condition to flourish. Looking thin and fragile they attract micromanagement and overt caretaking which causes them to withdraw further into themselves and their resolve to shut out the world. Recovery is a careful balance of giving the person the space to feel their own feelings, to experience appetite in every sense, and to come back to life.

With the right treatment, a full recovery is possible, and anorexia sufferers can rebuild a healthy relationship with food and with themselves. Sometimes this includes a period in residential treatment to create the practical living balance required to do the emotional work.

**If you think you suffering with anorexia then give us a call, we can help**

**Call 020 7323 4970**

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