

## Warning Signs of Anorexia<sup>1</sup>

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With concerns about childhood obesity on the rise, the plight of young people with eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa may not be on many people's minds. However, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, between 5 and 10 million people, including 1% of American teens, have an eating disorder (Collins, 2004). Anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder characterized by excessive weight loss and severely distorted body image, is one of the most common psychiatric diagnoses in young women (Dubé, 2001).

Often parents and friends fail to recognize warning signs of anorexia. Teens with anorexia may comment about feeling "fat" or overweight, although they actually are losing weight. They may become preoccupied with food, calories, fat grams, and dieting. Parents may find it difficult to get them to participate in family meals, and when they do they tend to eat very little, and will chew excessively and rearrange food on their plate. Teens with anorexia will often withdraw from friends, family, and activities, and may exercise for hours at a time.

Early identification and treatment of anorexia nervosa is essential to avoid serious health effects and even death. Parents who suspect that their teen has an eating disorder should ask their family physician or pediatrician for a referral to a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Treatment usually involves a team of physicians, therapists, and nutritionists who

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provide counseling, nutrition therapy, and medication (Segal, 2004). The most important thing that family and friends can offer a person dealing with anorexia is unconditional love.

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