

# UCSC

Counseling &  
Psychological Services

# Eating Issues

Guidance for working on problems with eating  
and self-image and getting back to life!

Eating problems are common in college age women, and the incidence of issues with eating is rising in men. Eating problems affect people of all race, ethnic, class, sexual orientation, and age groups.

Eating problems are more than a problem with food intake. They are associated with patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that develop over time. They range from the more common problems of chronic dieting and compulsive eating to the more physically dangerous and debilitating eating disorders.

Eating problems can develop in response to a combination of individual, interpersonal, family, and sociocultural factors. Eating problems often develop as a way to cope with depression, anxiety, stress, concerns about sexuality, feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.

A variety of cultural factors provide a context for the development of eating problems. Women and girls are consistently taught from an early age that their self-worth is largely dependent on their physical appearance, and that their appearance must fit the ideal of Western culture. Yet the perfect, ideal woman seen in the media is usually young, White, heterosexual, tall and thin, which represents less than 5% of the women in the United States.

It is possible to recover from and correct eating problems, but you must first acknowledge the problem and seek out help. Individuals with eating problems can sometimes feel ashamed or abnormal because they feel "out of control" of a normal part of life. What people learn as they recover is that they have used food or have tried to use eating as a way to cope with the difficulties in life which they felt unprepared to handle.

## Signs & Symptoms of Anorexia

- :: very restricted eating or self-starving
- :: constant thoughts/worries of weight
- :: intense fear of becoming fat
- :: may vomit, exercise intensely, or purge
- :: plays with food, cuts food into little pieces
- :: missing three or more menstrual periods
- :: feels "fat" even if obviously underweight
- :: loss of 15% total body weight
- :: eating and exercise interfere with social activities

## Physical Symptoms

- :: constipation
- :: mood swings
- :: hypersensitive to cold
- :: fainting, dizzy
- :: lanugo (fine body hair)
- :: dry skin/hair loss
- :: trouble concentration on work/studies
- :: lethargy and periods of hyperactivity

## Signs & Symptoms of Bulimia

- :: ashamed of body/hates body for being "too fat"
- :: cycles of binge eating followed by fasting, strict dieting, purging, or excessive exercise
- :: recurrent overeating - eating large amounts of food rapidly in short period of time
- :: overeating feels uncontrollable
- :: avoids friends and family when feeling "fat"
- :: may use laxatives, diuretics, or diet pills
- :: secret or compulsive eating

## Physical Symptoms

- :: fatigue, fainting spells
- :: mood swings
- :: chronic bowel problems
- :: nausea, heartburn
- :: swollen glands by jaw
- :: weight fluctuation
- :: danger of stomach rupture
- :: danger of kidney failure if vomiting

***Recovery is a process of both learning to eat and managing one's weight, and of building self-esteem and learning to cope with life in more effective ways!***

*From the heart:*

“It is time to help myself heal and develop the capacity to live a full and satisfying life free from eating issues.”

“If you trust and commit to your own desire to get well, you will recognize the right path for you.”

“It is your willingness to find the path that really matters in the healing process.”

### *CPS Contact Info*

CPS provides a variety of services including individual, couples, family, group counseling, and stress reduction.

#### **Psychological Crisis or Suicidal Concerns**

**(M-Fri 8am – 5pm):**  
CPS: 459-2628  
Psychiatry 459-2214  
Student Health 459-2211

#### **24-Hour Crisis or Suicidal Concerns:**

Suicide Prevention of  
Santa Cruz 458-5300  
or 1-877-663-5433  
UC Emergency 911

#### **Psychiatric Emergencies**

**After 5pm and Weekends**  
County Mental Health  
462-7644

**For more information visit our website:**

[www2.ucsc.edu/counsel](http://www2.ucsc.edu/counsel)

## **Ways to start working on eating issues today!**

### **Better eating behaviors make a difference:**

- \*\* Eat when hungry. Trust your body’s message about hunger. Keep a chart of what you’re eating and what you’re feeling before and after eating. These food logs work!
- \*\* Eat three or four regular meals a day, even if you overeat the night before. Eating regularly helps you feel less deprived and can reduce binge eating.
- \*\* Focus on health and well-being, rather than calories and diets. Research shows diets don’t work and they take away your choices about eating or not eating.
- \*\* Eat with others, rather than eating alone. Feeling isolated can lead to bad habits.
- \*\* The more restricted your diet, the more likely your body will want to binge to quell feelings of hunger.

### **Help your body, help yourself:**

- \*\* Exercise regularly and moderately, watch to not do it compulsively.
- \*\* Be realistic about your weight and your body shape. Body shape and size are largely genetic.
- \*\* Challenge unrealistic beliefs about body image and thinness and about yourself!
- \*\* Learn to accept your body and be comfortable with your body, even when it doesn’t meet societal standards of “perfection.”
- \*\* Find a supportive counselor or a good book to help you feel more positive about your body.

### **Your emotions and your stress are really important:**

- \*\* Examine your emotional hunger. We often eat for emotional and physical reasons. What are you feeling and why do you eat more than your body needs?
- \*\* What is it that you want from food that you can get in another way? Find other ways of nourishing yourself without restricting, bingeing, or compulsive eating.
- \*\* Determine what feelings you may not be addressing or are avoiding. Learn new ways of coping with feelings without abusing yourself or food.
- \*\* Do more of the healthy behaviors that make you feel good, involve yourself in relationships that are nourishing, make a list of enjoyable activities and do them!
- \*\* Learn relaxation and stress management techniques. Learn new ways to deal with anger or assertiveness if these are problems for you.
- \*\* Seek counseling (individual or group) in order to gain support, to get in touch with your emotions and to find other ways to live life more fully in a healthy way!

### ***Did you know...***

*That Counseling and Psychological Services offers individual counseling for eating issues and also offers regular group support for finding a way for yourself or someone you care about to heal. We can also make referrals to community resources that can also help.*