

Understanding Eating Disorders

Many of us are familiar with the signs and symptoms of various eating disorders. We realize that restricting food intake, over exercising and significant weight loss are characteristic of those with anorexia. We know that bulimics typically binge and purge. Binge eating disorder is basically self-explanatory. With EDNOS, Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified, we see those who struggle with food issues who may not fit the textbook criteria of other named eating disorders. On the surface, however, it's difficult for others to understand these varied food related behaviors.

To better understand some of the factors that trigger people into these often misunderstood struggles, I suggest you start by asking yourself the following questions.

1. Do your emotions sometimes overwhelm you?
2. Have you ever reached for food, a substance or a behavior for comfort?
3. Have you ever been abused in any way?
4. Have you been through a traumatic experience?
5. Do you find you believe things about yourself that may not really be true?
6. Have you ever engaged in a behavior you know is not good for you?
7. Do you have difficulty expressing yourself?
8. Do you ever feel your circumstances are out of control?
9. Do you think you don't deserve to have good things happen in your life?
10. Do you strive to be perfect?

While each person's make up and situation is unique, these are some of the more common issues present with those who battle eating disorders. The types of issues I've covered in the above questions are factors that often lead people to reach for many unhealthy substances or behaviors. Some may reach for alcohol, gambling, cigarettes, or even work or busyness instead of using food related behaviors. However, underneath, we may have more in common than we realize.

If you find yourself perplexed, surprised or even judgmental about those who practice unhealthy food related behaviors, ask yourself about your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Doing so will likely give you a bit better understanding of those with eating disorders.