

# What is Anorexia?

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder in which people are afraid of gaining weight. They keep their body weight very low by dieting, vomiting, or excessively exercising.

Despite being underweight, people with anorexia often see themselves as overweight.



## Development of anorexia

Certain factors can enhance the risk of developing anorexia. However, it is important to note that these factors do not mean that any eating disorder will surely be developed.

- Depression
- Dieting
- Low self-esteem
- Transitions
- Trauma
- Abuse
- Substance misuse in the family
- History of eating disorders in family



## Symptoms

Extreme weight loss

Constipation and abdominal pain

Rigid meal or eating rituals

Social withdrawal

Severely restricting food intake

Frequently skipping meals

Eating only a few certain "safe" foods

Exercising excessively

Thin appearance

Insomnia

Preoccupation with food

Irritability

Denial of hunger

Intolerance of cold

Fatigue

Bingeing and self-induced vomiting

## Who can develop anorexia?

Anyone can develop anorexia. However, it is more common in women. A person can develop anorexia for any number of reasons, and there is usually an accumulation of 'risk factors' that lead to its development.

## Is there a treatment for anorexia?

Anorexia is difficult to treat, and relapse is common. However, it is important to get help when needed as a person's life might be at risk. Treatment for anorexia is done using a team approach - it includes doctors, mental health professionals, and dietitians.

If someone's life is in immediate danger, hospitalisation may be needed. The first goal of treatment is getting back to a healthy weight.

Therapy with qualified mental health professionals can be very beneficial in the treatment of anorexia:

### Family Therapy

Systemic family therapy is the most recommended treatment for adolescents with anorexia. This approach requires the family coming together and working together towards recovery.

### Individual Therapy

Adults can attend individual therapy as a part of their treatment. The main goals are to normalize eating patterns and behaviors to support weight gain, and to work on beliefs and thoughts that maintain restrictive eating.