

Medical Practitioner's Reference for

Disordered Eating in Children & Adolescents



St. Louis Adolescent Eating Disorders Coalition

We are a group of licensed medical and mental health professionals who specialize in adolescent eating disorders.

We are committed to promoting effective treatment of these life-threatening illnesses.

Early Identification

Disordered eating is vastly undertreated, potentially leading to mental and physical health impairments that continue into adulthood. Early identification and specialized treatment are essential to improve prognosis, even with emerging or sub-clinical symptoms. Time matters. Often by the time disordered eating is identified, physical and mental impairment have already progressed.

Parents rely on physicians to confirm when there is a problem.

Risk Factors and Warning Signs:

- Family history of anxiety and eating disorders.
- Comorbid anxiety, OCD, or perfectionism.
- Dieting or weight loss behaviors, regardless of child's weight.
- Participation in activities/sports with body or weight ideals.
- Injury (e.g. stress fractures and concussions).
- Dietary changes (e.g. vegetarianism).
- Food-related medical problems in family or child (e.g. diabetes, Crohn's Disease, food allergies, Celiac Disease, Heart Disease).
- Gastrointestinal problems.
- Delayed menstruation.
- Significant family changes (e.g. moving, change in school, death in family, parent divorce).

WHAT IS BEST PRACTICE?

- Multidisciplinary team required. Regular medical monitoring by a physician is critical early on.
- Initial focus on symptoms and perpetuating factors, rather than underlying causes. Medical and behavioral stability must be addressed first, allowing the adolescent to more fully engage in other therapeutic issues.
- Family Based Treatment (FBT) should be one of the first line considerations for adolescents with anorexia nervosa if medically stable, otherwise a higher level of care (IOP, PHP, RTC, Inpt) should be considered.
- FBT involves education, skill building and empowerment of parents, to help their child maintain healthy eating and weight.