

Eating Disorders in America

by

Dr. Darlene Treese

"We can secure other people's approval, if we do right and try hard; but our own is worth a hundred of it"
-Mark Twain

Eating disorders are not just recent phenomena. The Ancient Romans had lavish parties and the participants would go to vomitoriums to empty their stomachs so they could continue to eat. The Ancient Greeks were also bulimics and they binged and purged more than once a day.

We have progressed as a society and no longer practice these unhealthy and dangerous activities as a group. But there are still segments of our population that continue these rituals.

Determining the cause for eating disorders in America is an extremely complex issue. For some, low self-esteem is one contributor, along with feelings of helplessness, stress, or issues concerning internal and external control. Sometimes family members may pass on their own fears of being overweight, or make negative comments about a young girl's changing body. This may cause her to want to be as thin as possible to please the rest of the family. Some other causes of eating disorders include strict and overprotective parenting, family problems, and even a fear of sexuality. Recent research indicates there may be a genetic component as well.

And let's not forget the societal pressures. In America, sex sells. Every magazine, every television commercial, every movie is selling "thin is beautiful, thin will get you married and thin will make you rich and famous." The average American model is 5' 11" and weighs 117 pounds, while the average American woman is 5' 4" and weighs 140 pounds. This one statistic, that the average model is thinner than 98% of American women, could explain why 80% of American women are not happy with how they look.

Forty six percent of girls nine to eleven years old are frequently dieting to lose weight. Forty two percent of first, second and third grade girls report wanting to be thinner, 81% of ten year old girls are afraid of becoming fat and 51% of nine and ten-year-old girls feel better if they are on a diet.

When children begin dieting at such a young age, they are comparing their young bodies to those of adult women. They are continually confused about why they can't look like the "perfect icons" of our society. They continue to try to change their bodies but because they are much too young and their bodies not yet matured, they are unsuccessful; they then begin to try to fix the image they see in the mirror. No matter how their body matures, they see an image that is fat and unacceptable. They begin to believe that if they could just lose a little more weight, everything would be better.

Some of the warning signs that a person may have an eating disorder include eating in secret, wearing loose clothing, and trying to isolate themselves because of depression.

Let me make this very clear: eating disorders cause permanent body damage, and are often fatal. The number one cause of death for young women between the ages of 14 and 24 is physical complications that are a direct result of eating disorders.

Most eating disorders, (bulimia, anorexia and binge eating), are found in young women from ages 14 to 24. Because these young women usually experience denial and shame, an intervention is often necessary to initiate treatment. There is help for these misguided young women through weight stabilization programs, intensive counseling and hypnosis, and sometimes psychotropic medication. The best cure, however, is to eliminate the problem.

Be aware of the messages we are sending to our youth:

- Don't send the message that the thinner you are, the better you are.
- Don't promote our underweight models as the norm or even the example of what you should strive to be.
- Don't tell our young women that happiness comes from thinness.
- Don't tell them that looks are more important than who they are, what they think, and what they feel.

Healthy diet and exercise to maintain a healthy body weight are excellent attainable goals. Healthy minds and healthy bodies go hand in hand.

Dr. Darlene Treese has been in private practice in hypnosis and counseling since 1983. She is a Diplomate in Counseling with the National Institute of Sports, Past President of the American Psychotherapy and Medical

Hypnosis Association and Vice President of the Rotary EClub of Southwest USA. Darlene has been internationally acknowledged for her positive action and solution-based therapies and work with corporations. "A person for the people", Dr. Dar is always available to help with your questions and dilemmas through office visits, email or telephone consultations. Call her at **850-201-0073** or visit **www.AskDrTreese.com**