

MEDICAL COMPLICATIONS of Eating Disorders

Patients with eating disorders are at risk for a host of medical complications. Early intervention is essential in the prevention of life-altering, as well as life-threatening, medical problems.



Signs, Symptoms and Complications:

ANOREXIA NERVOSA

- Emaciation
- Bradycardia
- Hypotension
- Dry skin/brittle hair/hair loss
- Amenorrhea- placing patients at risk for infertility, osteopenia and osteoporosis
- Lanugo-growth of fine downy hair
- Yellow skin-carotenemia
- Edema
- Gastrointestinal complications such as irritable bowel syndrome, abdominal pain and chronic constipation
- Lab abnormalities may include life-threatening electrolyte changes, abnormal thyroid function tests, abnormal liver function tests, protein and ketones in the urine, hypercholesterolemia, and decreased white and red blood cell and platelet counts
- Seizures
- Death from cardiac complications

BULIMIA NERVOSA

- Irregular menses
- "Russell's sign" - calluses on back of hands
- Parotid gland hypertrophy and irritation
- Dental enamel erosion/Periodontal disease
- Cheilosis-perioral irritation
- Fatigue
- Esophageal disease - GERD, Barrett's Esophagus (precancerous lesions on the esophageal lining, pseudo Bartter's syndrome)
- Lower GI symptoms - pain, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, cathartic colon
- Headaches
- Severe electrolyte abnormalities, metabolic alkalosis and dehydration, as well as hypokalemia, hyponatremia, hypochloremia, hypomagnesemia, and hypocalcemia that can lead to cardiac arrhythmias and sudden death

BINGE EATING DISORDER

- Hypertension
- Gallbladder disease
- High cholesterol
- Type II Diabetes
- Severe abdominal discomfort
- Heart disease
- Kidney stones
- Depression and psychological problems
- Increased risk for cancers of the liver and colon



The Renfrew Center has been the pioneer in the treatment of eating disorders since 1985. As the nation's first residential eating disorder facility, now with 19 locations throughout the country, Renfrew has helped more than 85,000 adolescent girls, women, transgender, and non-binary individuals with eating disorders and other behavioral health issues move towards recovery.

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