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### **EATING DISORDERS** **The Diet Dilemma: Anorexia and Bulimia** **American Osteopathic Association**

We live in a weight-conscious society where thin is in and anything other than skinny is just not pretty. If you don't believe this, flip on the television or head to the movies, where you will see actress upon actress wearing the perfect size 3. Or, pick up any fashion magazine and read the feature article about the latest ultra-thin modeling sensation.

Society's attitude toward thinness is having a dramatic and negative effect upon young women in the United States. According to the American Anorexia Bulimia Association, Inc. (AABA), 50 percent of 9-year-old girls and 80 percent of 10-year-old girls have dieted. In addition, it is estimated that more than five million Americans suffer from anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating. Of these five million, more than 1,000 will die yearly as a result of their eating disorders.

Anorexia nervosa is an eating condition that commonly attacks young women in their teens. However, women as young as 5 and as old as 60 have been clinically diagnosed. People with anorexia, (anorectics) are obsessed with the fear of being fat or becoming fat. Because of this fear, they intentionally lose a great deal of body weight in a short period of time. Often, they suffer from depression and poor body image, and they tend to feel a loss of control in their lives.

"Many anorectics feel drawn to this behavior due to a very traumatic emotional event in their lives," states Carol Henwood, DO, an osteopathic family practitioner who practices in Pennsylvania. "The hidden cause, however, is that these patients are actually battling poor self-esteem and are seeking to improve their feelings and take control of their lives."

To shed pounds, anorectics may exercise excessively, simply stop eating, or do both. As the pounds begin to fall away, most people feel elated. However, anorectics do not know when to stop. They continue to slim down despite health risks, always thinking that they are too fat—no matter how thin they become. And unlike people who lose weight in healthy ways, people with anorexia suffer from constant physical pain associated with not eating.

According to Dr. Henwood, some of the signs and symptoms of anorexia nervosa include depression,

anxiety, distorted body image, lack of a menstrual cycle, hyperactivity, constipation, growth of fine body hairs, brittle hair and nails, joint swelling, and loss of muscle and body fat. According to Dr. Henwood, some the effects of starvation are low body temperature, low blood pressure, slowed metabolism, sluggish reflexes and irregular heartbeat (which can lead to heart failure).

In addition, after the loss of the body's normal fat padding, anorectics may find it difficult and painful to sit or lie down, thereby making sleep difficult. This only worsens their depression and feelings of physical weakness.

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder in which an individual binges on food and then purges that food after eating. The "binge" part involves a rapid consumption of large amounts of food. Following a binge, the individual will "purge." Such people purge their recently eaten food through a variety of means, including vomiting, abusing laxatives, compulsive exercising, or fasting. Some people with bulimia nervosa (bulimics) may binge and purge more than 20 times a day.

While a young woman suffering from anorexia may be easily identified because of her rapid weight loss, the signs and symptoms of bulimia are often difficult to recognize. The reason for this is that bulimics often maintain a normal body weight. Bulimics appear to be healthy, happy, and striving for perfection—even though their bulimia is causing unseen damage to their bodies.

Behind the mask, bulimics often suffer from the same mentally crippling problems as anorectics. This can include low self-esteem, poor body image, depression, and an obsessive need to take control over their lives.

In addition, many people with bulimia suffer from other compulsive disorders, such as shoplifting, smoking, drinking, and drug abuse. For most healthy young women, the average caloric intake falls between 2,000 and 3,000 calories a day. People with bulimia often average an intake of 3,400 calories in just 1 1/4 hours. Some people with bulimia have been known to consume nearly 20,000 calories in an eight-hour period and spend as much as \$50 a day on food.

The symptoms of bulimia nervosa can include mood swings, depression, feeling out of control, vomiting blood, loss of tooth enamel, swollen glands in the neck and face, broken blood vessels, stomach pain, weakness and sore throat.

Medical consequences of bulimia can include dehydration, damage to bowels, liver, and kidneys.

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Also electrolyte imbalance which can lead to irregular heartbeat or heart failure.

"The most important thing to keep in mind when it comes to anorexia and bulimia is that the effects of these diseases can be life-threatening," stresses Dr. Henwood. "An individual battling either one of these disorders must seek immediate help."

When treating patients who are suffering from eating disorders, Dr. Henwood incorporates the osteopathic philosophy into treating the patient.

"I treat the whole patient," she explains. "I look at helping these patients to improve all aspects of their lives. This includes school, family, and broken relationships."

The love and support of family and friends is crucial in the battle to overcome an eating disorder. In addition, professional assistance in psychotherapy, nutrition counseling and behavior modification, may be incorporated in a patient's wellness plan. Also, self-help groups may be beneficial for many patients.

Currently there is not a specific medication that can be prescribed to cure eating disorders, however, many physicians are finding success with anti-depressants.

"Anti-depressants are effective in helping to treat eating disorders," Dr. Henwood explains. "With the use of these medications, patients find they are less depressed and that their self-image improves."

Although anti-depressants can help, Dr. Henwood stresses that recovery cannot happen until the individual is ready to make a change. "The patient must be willing to get to the root of the eating problem," said Dr. Henwood. "For some people, this can be a lifelong struggle."

## Osteopathic Medicine

Craig M. Wax, DO

With so much information available and so many choices, it's hard to choose a health care provider. There are many different kinds of physicians, doctors, nurses, assistants, therapists and counselors. In fact, new titles seem to pop up every day. However, there is one type of health care provider that can meet many of your medical needs.

Osteopathic physicians (DOs) are fully trained and licensed medical practitioners able to prescribe medication and perform surgery. They can be found practicing in any specialty area of medicine, however, approximately 65 percent of the nation's 52,000 DOs are primary care physicians. Like MDs, DOs must complete four years of medical school and a residency in their

specialty area. But, DOs also receive additional training in preventative care and hands-on manipulation or osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT).

OMT works in a variety of ways and in many situations. It can be helpful in treating low back pain as well as relieving discomfort and/or musculoskeletal abnormalities associated with a number of disorders, such as asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome, menstrual pain, sinus disorders and migraines. When conscientiously applied, it serves to restore healthy tissue qualities through several mechanisms. These include soft tissue stretching techniques related to deep massage, muscle energy resistance techniques as well as thrusting techniques. This comprehensive approach predates both chiropractic and physical therapy. Hands-on techniques, though, have been used for centuries throughout the world with much success.

Osteopathic medicine is a discipline of health care that provides for a wide range of patient needs. It utilizes a health maintenance philosophy and incorporates "hands-on" techniques to alleviate pain and speed healing. In 1874, Andrew Taylor Still, MD, was frustrated with the accepted standard of medicine during that time. It consisted of poorly trained practitioners and poisonous heavy metal "medicines." As a result of his knowledge of anatomy, an open mind and his medical training, he founded a new branch of medicine called osteopathic medicine (physicians designated by DO).

Osteopathic medicine is a distinct approach that allows the physician to directly diagnose and treat the problem with his or her hands. He or she may also use medical instruments, tests, studies and exercise to augment your recovery.

Osteopathic medicine is used to guide you to your optimal health. All in all, DOs provide the most comprehensive health care available today in a variety of health care settings. With a preventive approach and the ability to use OMT, DOs address the whole patient, not just the specific injury or illness.

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