

## Natural Help 4...

# Anorexia Nervosa



## What is Anorexia?

**Anorexia nervosa** is classified as **an eating disorder** where sufferers have an obsession with food and are overly concerned with being thin. They are often so terrified of gaining weight that they go to extreme measures to lose or maintain a body weight that is below normal for their age and height.

**Anorexic** individuals **restrict the amount of calories they consume**, sometimes to the point of self-starvation or purging by vomiting the small amount of food they do eat. They also use laxatives excessively or over-exercise so that their bodies burn more calories than they eat.

However, **anorexia** is more than simply the need to be thin or to restrict food intake. It is often **psychologically tied to the lack of control** the person may be experiencing in other aspects of their lives. On a subconscious level, **anorexic** individuals may feel a sense of accomplishment that they have control over something in their life. The constant mental pre-occupation with food and their weight means that mental anguish or other emotions are avoided and not dealt with.

People with **anorexia nervosa** are often overly sensitive to world issues, and often take the worries of the world onto their shoulders. The strict restriction of food may be used as a measure of **how good they are at restraining themselves**, taking willpower to an extreme degree. They can see it as a great feat, and inwardly applaud their determination.

## Who Suffers from Anorexia and is it Serious?

**Anorexia** is much more **prevalent in Western Societies** than elsewhere in the world. This can be attributed to the commonly held Western notion that a slim figure is attractive – a notion that is perpetuated by the media and fashion.

**Anorexia** affects mainly young women; the most common age of onset being between 15 and 19. Approximately 90% of all cases are female. This can also be **linked to a societal ideal** that encourages women to be thin and men to have a strong muscular body type.

**Anorexia** is a **very serious disorder with a high mortality rate**, and often results in severe medical consequences if left untreated. Most people with **anorexia** do not believe that they have a disorder and usually view their weight loss as an accomplishment.

For this reason, they **seldom seek help for themselves** and are usually brought

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into treatment by a concerned parent or friend. There is hope, however, as there are **successful treatments available**, and many [anorexics](#) are able to overcome their disorder and regain a healthy body-weight and sense of self.

## What are the Effects of Anorexia on the Body?

Inadequate amounts of food **results in malnutrition**, which adversely affects all the body's organs. Many [anorexic girls](#) **permanently damage their vital body systems and functioning**, which often includes the reproductive organs, heart, and kidneys.

[Anorexic girls](#) commonly experience loss of menstruation (amenorrhea).

[Anorexia](#) can have **serious medical complications** and severe symptoms, as the effects of self-starvation and purging take a serious toll on the body's health.

Some of the many consequences of [anorexia](#) include:

- Loss of menstruation (amenorrhea)
- Dry skin and brittle nails
- Brittle and thinning hair
- Sensitivity or intolerance to cold temperatures
- Cardiovascular problems such as chronically low blood pressure and heart rate, palpitations, and in extreme cases, heart failure
- Electrolyte imbalances: low potassium, sodium and magnesium
- Kidney stones or kidney failure
- Changes in brain chemistry, often resulting in depression
- Lowered immune system functioning
- Constipation and bloating
- Headaches due to malnutrition
- In severe cases, nerve damage such as numbness or mild paralysis in the feet or leg can occur

## When Should I Worry About Anorexia?

[Signs of anorexia nervosa](#) include **obsessive thoughts of food** and being frantically concerned with body image or weight gain. People exhibiting [signs of anorexia](#) typically feel less anxious when they have **control over their strict diet and disciplined weight loss**. Other [signs of anorexia](#) include feeling hopelessly unsatisfied with your figure every time you look into the mirror, even though your family and friends comment on how thin you are.

Many [anorexics](#) fail to see that this is a problem, or their **fear of weight-gain overshadows their fear of health complications** and physical discomfort.


[Anorexia](#) is a **serious condition** and has been identified as the **psychological disorder with the highest mortality rate**, with 10% of all cases being fatal due to resulting medical complications. It also has a very high suicide rate, as it often co-exists with [depression](#).

Parents who are concerned that a child has [anorexia](#) should seek professional advice and assessment. While many teenagers develop picky eating habits, [anorexia](#) is a serious condition requiring medical treatment. [Anorexic girls](#) and



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### Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



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Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

**young women** often must be treated in medical facilities where they are monitored 24 hours a day.

## Diagnosing Anorexia

When seeking professional help for you or your child, a health care professional will perform a series of tests before making a diagnosis. This will include a **full psychological as well as physical examination**, with possible blood tests and urine analysis.

Your doctor will be checking for **confirmation of an eating disorder**, as well as checking for damage or complications caused by the [anorexia](#) such as kidney problems or electrolyte abnormalities. You will be referred to a psychologist who will take a full psychological history, discuss feelings and attitudes towards food and body-image, and examine eating, purging, exercising habits and rituals.

## What are the Symptoms of Anorexia?

- Severely low body mass index in relation to age or height that is self-induced
- Refusal to maintain normal body weight
- Unhealthy obsession with food and the amount of calories taken in compared to the amount used
- An intense fear of gaining weight
- Distorted body image – will often think she or he is fat even though noticeably thin
- Often feels self-worth is dependant on body shape
- Misses at least three consecutive menstruation periods
- Increased downy hair on face and limbs (lanugo)

## What Causes Anorexia?

- **Genetics** – Research suggests that people with an [anorexic](#) family member are **approximately 4 times more likely to develop the disorder** compared to the general population. While this may suggest that there is a **genetic component to the disorder**, it may also be attributed to the shared experiences and learned behaviors within the family. It is also likely that the personality traits related to [anorexia](#) such as perfectionism, emotional sensitivity, and perseverance are inherited rather than the disorder itself.
- **Family and Learned Behavior** – As mentioned, learned behavior may contribute to an increased risk of developing [anorexia](#). Parents who place great importance on physical appearances, criticize their child's body shape, or who are dieting themselves are more likely to have a child that will develop an eating disorder. In many cases, it is young girls from families that “bottle-up” emotions and avoid conflict at all cost that develop [anorexia](#).
- **Culture and The Media** – Western society places great emphasis on the body's aesthetic. Women are under scrutiny far more than men in this regard. Society is influenced by the media – a force which is instrumental in shaping ideals. Fashion dictates what is seen as ‘attractive’ and most fashion houses favor a pre-pubescent figure for women. When girls start to fill out into their rounder womanly figures, they are often met with criticism and become self-conscious. To further complicate things, the media often gives

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men and women unrealistic expectations of what the body should look like - often displaying below-weight models and actresses. This can lead to a false idea of what is 'normal'. Furthermore, many young men come to expect this standard too and so women may find themselves constantly striving to live up to skewed expectations.

- **Restrictive eating** – Studies have shown that dieting and restrictive eating lead to obsessions about food. This may trigger [anorexia](#) or lead to over-eating. Peer groups can have a large influence, especially for teenage girls, as thinness is idealized and diets become fashionable. The media also encourages dieting, with the slimming industry bringing in huge amounts of revenue worldwide every year.

## Help for Anorexia

In severe cases, a brief hospitalization period may be necessary where health practitioners will monitor vital signs, hydration levels and food consumption. In milder cases, the patient may be allowed to stay at home, with regular visits and health checks. A treatment plan is often drawn up that follows medical progress, and implements dietary changes and psychological therapy. Your medical team may consist of psychologists or counselors, medical doctors, and a nutritionist or dietician.

## Psychotherapy

Individual, family, or group therapy will be very beneficial in dealing with [anorexia](#). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) helps the individual **address the negative ideas surrounding food and weight-gain**, while family therapy may help the entire family deal with underlying conflicts and **provide coping techniques** for the family as a whole. Support groups are often a source of support for the individual struggling with [anorexia](#), as people share their success stories and goals.

## Drug Treatments

There are no drug treatments available to 'cure' [anorexia](#), although certain drugs may be prescribed to assist other accompanying disorders such as depression or anxiety. It is strongly advised that you **research any prescription medication and their side-effects before agreeing to drug therapy**.

## Natural Herbal and Homeopathic Remedies

Certain **natural remedies may be able to assist with some of the symptoms** of anxiety and depression associated with [anorexia](#) without the negative side effects of prescription medications-- but with all the benefits.

**Herbal formulas that are frequently used for [anorexia](#)** are Melissa Officinalis (Lemon Balm), Lavender and Passiflora Incarnata to soothe the mind and calm the nerves. Some herbal remedies (e.g. Hypericum perforatum or St. John's Wort) have been very successful in balancing mood, improving self esteem and stabilizing thoughts – thereby providing a sound platform for recovery. **MindSoothe** supports a healthy motivated attitude, facilitates a reasonable attitude and lessens the burden on pressured minds. **MindSoothe** also supports



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## Disorders that May be Related to Anorexia

- Bulimia nervosa is closely related to [anorexia](#), and in many cases [anorexics](#) become bulimic.
- Depression is high among individuals with [anorexia](#)
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is closely related
- Substance abuse is also common among [anorexics](#)

## Tips for Coping with Anorexia

- **Talk to your dietician or medical doctor** about necessary supplements. It may take time before you change all your old eating habits, and until then, you need to ensure that your body is receiving all the nutrients it needs.
- **Stick to your treatment and meal plans.** It will be difficult at first, but focus on the fact that you are on the road to a healthy body and mind.
- **Try not to push supportive people away.** Understand that caring friends and family who push you to stick with your treatment have your best interests at heart, and they only want to see you get better.
- **Buy a journal.** Keeping a record of your thoughts and feelings can be very helpful. You can track your progress and note when and why negative eating thoughts arise. Try to uncover the emotional reasons behind your eating disorder.
- **Resist the urge to constantly weigh yourself** or check yourself in the mirror. These habits only serve to encourage an unhealthy lifestyle.
- **Adopt a loving relationship with yourself.** Treat your body with love and respect by implementing a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet, exercise, and enough rest. Set aside times where you pamper and treat yourself.
- **Try to stop criticism as soon as it enters your mind.** Judging yourself is an unhealthy habit at the heart of eating disorders. Accept yourself as well as those around you as beautiful inside and out - just as is. Do not buy into media's view of the unrealistically skinny figure.
- Remember that while you may feel a sense of control when self-starving or controlling your weight, **you are in fact out of control** – it is the [anorexia](#) that is in control until you make the decision to change.
- **Recognize the influences in your life that promote your disorder.** Avoid too much TV and reading beauty magazines, as they give a distorted view of beauty. You may need to avoid certain friends if they encourage your old habits, or address the people that put pressure on you to be thin.

## Tips for Concerned Parents

- Many parents feel concerned that their child may have an eating disorder, or may develop one. While it is not always easy to tell that your child is suffering from [anorexia](#), you can **look out for the common signs and symptoms** such as weight loss, baggy clothing, obsessive behavior around food, or if your child always has an excuse for not eating or eats very little in front of you.
- Should you suspect a problem, **talk to your child** in a supportive and non-critical manner. You may be met with denial, excuses or justification, as

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- many [anorexics](#) do not feel that they have a problem. Take your child for a medical check if you are seriously concerned.
- **Research [anorexia](#)** so that you have all the facts and information on treatment centers in your area. There are plenty of recommended books that will be able to assist you in helping your child - especially if you are met with resistance.
  - **Help your child develop a healthy relationship with food** by adopting one yourself. Minimize talk about dieting and weight. If you are critical of weight in yourself and others, your child may start to develop unrealistic expectations.
  - **Praise your child for what she/he does** and not what they look like. Encourage her inner strengths and beautiful personality traits.
  - **Make meal times a time for connecting with your child and family.**
  - **Equip your child with positive coping skills** and encourage communication with in your family.

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## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that only a few decades ago, **homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used** even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned upon by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, **natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed** by conventional doctors, and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the **body has an innate capacity to heal itself**. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the **broad range of treatment options and approaches** that are to be found within the practice of natural medicine. Holistic medicine encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to **support health, relieve symptoms, and prevent future disease**. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "...more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which **strives to support health** (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer. In many cases, **holistic medicine can accomplish just as much**, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction, and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs.

Contrary to common perception-- and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way-- **natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing**. In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a **long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety**. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that like any medicine, **herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way**, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately, not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer the benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper production lines), they have grave disadvantages, including an increase in side effects-- as the **medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties** of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the **Full Spectrum Method of extraction**, which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a **more complete treatment** as well as **superior protection against side effects**.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. **Research what is best for you**. If you have a chronic or life-threatening condition, don't make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will **support patients who want to**

**take responsibility for their own health.**

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