

SHOUT OUT/

'Pay your own way as much as you can'

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who need to have what we want to have, humbling ourselves and rolling under the protective net of our parents once we've left is nearly impossible. What's the solution? Become independent! Don't try to convince your parents you deserve a computer unless you work hard and earn it! Don't complain if they don't want to pay for your car insurance much longer. If you can't pay for your own gasoline, and driving yourself around isn't the only way to get to places you need to go, don't expect anyone else to pay for you. Pay your own way as much as you can, and get used to making sacrifices. This brings us to the ultimate question, which comes with an even more vital decision to make: do we want to move out, and if we do, what are we willing to sacrifice? Or are we comfortable living at home for a while, willing to make sacrifices for our parents (who now have no obligation to provide for us)? This is a crucial question in every teen's life, and it must be answered.

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DISORDERS/ Culture, genetics play roles

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Health advocates say taking laxatives to purge food doesn't work because most food is digested before reaching the large intestine, where laxatives take effect. Instead, they leach the body of necessary fluids and nutrients.

Skipping meals, eating too few calories or taking diet aids without a doctor's advice can leave teens weak, unable to focus and

robbed of the nutrients needed to stay healthy.

The National Eating Disorders Association says risky eating patterns are most common among adolescent women.

Not 'all in the head'

"Students just have issues with weight," said Juana Botello, a counselor at Greenfield High School. "I think it's about wanting to fit in, and culturally, being thin is the way to be in."

Partly true, the association says.

Research shows genetics plays a role in who develops severe eating disorders. For instance, a new study led by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill researchers estimates genes are about 56 percent responsible for anorexia nervosa.

However, emotions, social pressure and lifestyle also play big roles. People sometimes try to control food when feeling overwhelmed

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by other things, the association said.

"For some, dieting, bingeing and purging may begin as a way to cope with painful emotions and to feel in control of one's life," the association's Web site says, "but ultimately, these behaviors will damage a person's physical and emotional health, self-esteem, and sense of competence and control."

Like people with alcohol or drug addictions, those with eating disorders need help from trained professionals to recover, according to the association. Friends, family and others can help someone dealing with extreme diet problems.

Support at home

Letting teens know they're important is key, Botello said, because self esteem issues, school- or sports-related pressure, and family problems can be factors in a teen's unhealthy eating habits.

More teens are aware of the dangers of eating disorders today, Botello said.

"We've had students in the hospital, so they've seen how damaging it can be. I don't see it happening as much as I used to," she said.

While the prognosis is good for Bazzola's friend, Bazzola said she's worried too many others in America have the wrong idea about what's attractive.

"Our society is just overtaken by having to have the perfect body," she said. "But we're not all gifted with a fast metabolism."

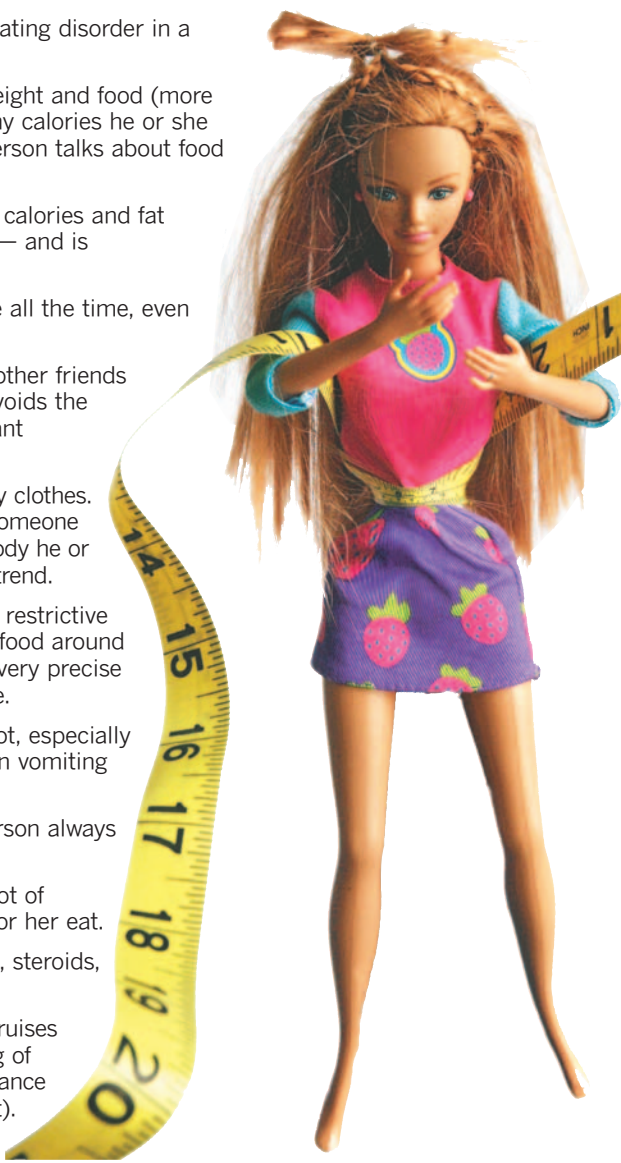
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EATING DISORDER SIGNS

Here are some tips for recognizing an eating disorder in a friend or in yourself:


- The person has an obsession with weight and food (more than general comments about how many calories he or she eats in a day). It might seem like the person talks about food and nothing else.
- The person knows exactly how many calories and fat grams are in everything he or she eats — and is constantly pointing this out.
- The person feels the need to exercise all the time, even when sick or exhausted.
- The person avoids hanging out with other friends during meals. For example, he or she avoids the school cafeteria at lunch or the restaurant where you usually meet on weekends.
- The person starts to wear big or baggy clothes. Lots of people wear baggy clothes, but someone who wears baggy clothes to conceal a body he or she doesn't like isn't following a fashion trend.
- The person goes on dramatic or very restrictive diets, cuts food into tiny pieces, moves food around on the plate instead of eating it, and is very precise about how food is arranged on the plate.
- The person goes to the bathroom a lot, especially right after meals, or you hear the person vomiting after eating.
- Despite losing a lot of weight, the person always talks about how fat he or she is.
- The person appears to be gaining a lot of weight even though you never see him or her eat.
- The person frequently takes laxatives, steroids, or diet pills.
- The person has a tendency to faint, bruises easily, is very pale, or starts complaining of being cold more than usual (cold intolerance can be a symptom of being underweight).

— SOURCE: KIDSHEALTH.ORG



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