



NCEED

National Center of Excellence
for Eating Disorders

CHECKLIST TO RECOGNIZE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN EATING DISORDER

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CHECKLIST TO RECOGNIZE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN EATING DISORDER

Healthcare providers are often the first to discover signs of an eating disorder. Routine exams can uncover many symptoms that otherwise do not get noticed.

This checklist helps you to understand the signs of an eating disorder so you can get people the help they need.

Signs and Symptoms of Eating Disorders

General Appearance



- Marked weight loss or gain
- Cold intolerance
- Fatigue or lethargy

Gastrointestinal



- Epigastric discomfort
- Abdominal bloating
- Heartburn
- Hematemesis (blood in vomit)

Dermatologic



- Hair loss
- Lanugo
- Nail changes
- Carotenoderma (yellowish discoloration of skin)
- Russell's sign (calluses or scars on the back of the hand from self-induced vomiting)

Endocrine



- Amenorrhea or oligomenorrhea (absent or irregular menses)
- Stress fractures
- Low bone mineral density

Neuropsychiatric



- Depressive or anxious symptoms or behaviors
- Poor concentration
- Self harm

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Early Recognition

Patients who present with these patterns should be evaluated for an eating disorder.

- Significant weight changes or fluctuations
- Sudden changes in eating behaviors (new vegetarianism/veganism, gluten-free, lactose-free, elimination of certain foods or food groups, eating only “healthy” foods, uncontrolled binge eating)
- Sudden changes in exercise patterns, excessive or compulsive exercise or involvement in extreme physical training
- Body image disturbance, the desire to lose weight despite low or normative weight, or extreme dieting behavior regardless of weight
- Abdominal complaints in the context of weight loss behaviors
- Electrolyte abnormalities without an identified medical cause (especially hypokalemia, hypochloremia, or elevated bicarbonate)
- Inappropriate use of appetite suppressants, caffeine, diuretics, laxatives, or other medications that might affect weight

If you believe your patient may have an eating disorder, there are several screening instruments you can apply. With additional indications from these screenings, referral to a mental health clinician is recommended.



-  [SCOFF Questionnaire - Adolescents and Adults](#)
-  [Eating Disorder Screener for Primary Care \(ESP\) - Adolescents and Adults](#)
-  [Binge Eating Disorder Screener-7 - Adults](#)

Source: “Eating Disorders, A Guide to Medical Care.” AED Report 2016, 3rd Edition. <https://www.aedweb.org/publications/medical-care-standards>
“Practice Parameter for the Assessment and Treatment of Children and Adolescents With Eating Disorders.” American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Volume 54, Number 5, May 2015. [https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(15\)00070-2/pdf](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(15)00070-2/pdf)