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Eating Disorders Awareness: Introduction

When normal attitudes and behaviors surrounding food, weight management, and body image become extreme, eating disorders can develop. Anyone—females, males, all races, people from all socioeconomic levels and all intelligence levels—can develop eating disorders. They are most common, however, among white, middle to upper class females between the ages of 13 and 30. Eating disorders among high school students in white middle or upper class households are likely to affect 5 to 10 percent of students.

There are many influences on the development of eating disorders. Cultural influences contribute greatly to many factors at the root of most eating disorders. The perceived ideal of slenderness for females and the body building type for males leads some individuals to strive for unrealistic expectations about changing their body type. These individuals define themselves in terms of their bodies. They come to think of dieting, weight control, weight gain, and rigid self-control of appetite as moral issues. While no single event or factor causes an eating disorder, professionals agree that dieting precedes the onset of most eating disorders.

Eating disorders have increased in the past ten years. The first step to addressing these illnesses is awareness. Those who work with or care about youth or other individuals with eating disorders and those who are concerned about preventing eating disorders need to understand these illnesses. The following series of general fact sheets were written to help increase knowledge and awareness of the issues surrounding these illnesses.

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