



Women's Health eNews
is produced and
distributed by
BC Women's
Hospital & Health
Centre Foundation.

[Donate Now](#)



[Need help with your](#)

[Mother's Day shopping? Celebrate a
special mom with BC Women's](#)



[Join Tamara Taggart and](#)

In This Issue:

Eating Disorders; Recognizing & Getting Help for Anorexia, Bulimia and Binge Eating

[Submit a story idea for eNews](#)

Eating Disorders; Recognizing & Getting Help for Anorexia, Bulimia and Binge Eating



"Everything looked perfect from the outside," says Vancouver-based travel writer, Lori Henry. "I had honour roll grades, was a role model at my dance studio and had lots of friends. Behind my smile, though, was a completely different picture. I spent my time in high school in Port Coquitlam, B.C., lying to those around me,

skipping school to binge on fast food, running on the treadmill until I couldn't stand, and nodding off in class from the sheer exhaustion of it all. Yet, for six years, no one knew I was bulimic."

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder that affects between 1% and 4% of women in Canada. Anorexia nervosa affects between 0.5% and 4% of women, and binge-eating disorder affects about 2% of all people in Canada.

Are eating disorders about being "addicted" to food? How do people recover from anorexia or bulimia - and what can parents do to help?

Let's find out...

Is Food Addictive? Causes of Eating Disorders

The compulsion to binge (eat food uncontrollably) and purge (rid the body of food) may make it seem like food is addictive. But, it's not *food* that's addictive. It's the *behaviour* - the process or habit of bingeing and purging (bulimia), or avoiding food altogether (anorexia).

Eating disorders may have different causes, depending on the person. Some people binge because the ritual of eating is comforting, or they crave the numbness that being too full brings. They may have starved themselves because they feel fat or ugly, and can't control their raging appetite. Others, like Lori, may feel overwhelmed and anxious, and use bingeing and purging as a tool to cope with problems and emotions.

An eating disorder is often an unhealthy tool for meeting emotional needs and feeling more in control of life.

[MarketPlace IGA](#)

[and buy your mum a](#)

[Bunches of Love Bouquet to benefit women and babies at BC Women's!](#)

facebook

[Take a peek inside BC Women's Hospital by visiting us on facebook!](#)



[Follow us on Twitter.](#)

The Three Main Eating Disorders

Anorexia nervosa is a psychological disorder that affects how people feel about their bodies and how they eat. They think their bodies are much bigger than they actually are, and may be very scared of gaining weight. They may also believe they'd be better people if they were thin.

People living with anorexia try to lose weight by eating very little, refusing to eat at all or exercising too much. They may refuse treatment because they fear they might get "fat." Some health issues that anorexia causes include heart problems, bone problems and fertility problems in women.



Bulimia nervosa also affects how people feel about their bodies and how they eat. They binge or eat a lot of food in a short period of time. While they eat, they feel out of control and yet good at the same time. When they're finished eating, they're scared they'll gain weight, so they try to purge the food. Like anorexia, people living with bulimia may think they're more overweight than they really are, or feel like they'd be a better person if they were thin.

It can be hard to tell if someone is struggling with bulimia because they may not lose a lot of weight. They may also secretly binge and purge - like Lori did. Even though bulimia isn't always as visible as anorexia, it can still cause long-term health problems.

Binge-eating disorder also known as compulsive overeating, is the third main type of eating disorder. It involves eating a lot of food in a short period of time (binge) on a regular basis. People struggling with binge eating can't control what or how much they eat, but they often feel distressed, disgusted, guilty or depressed after eating. The emotional causes of binge eating include sad feelings or depression, anxiety, stress or feeling "numb."

Who is Most Likely to Struggle With an Eating Disorder?



Though 90% of people diagnosed with anorexia and bulimia are women, binge-eating disorder affects men and women more equally.

Eating disorders often start in the teenage and young adult years, though they can also start earlier or later in life. Eating disorders tend to run in families, and may be associated with mood disorders like depression, anxiety disorders like obsessive-compulsive disorder, substance use disorders, and some personality disorders.

Recovering From an Eating Disorder

If you're a parent, Lori encourages you to listen to your children. "If they come to you for help, they are taking a very courageous step - one that most who are struggling with eating disorders don't feel safe enough to take," she says. "It usually means they're grasping at straws, resorting to the last thing in the world they want, but know they need: help."

Some people with eating disorders don't just refuse treatment; they get angry when confronted. "You must understand that you're asking them to give up their lifeline, the only way they have been able to cope with their life," says Lori. "I often recommend a free service called [MentorCONNECT](#), where those who are struggling are partnered up one-on-one with those who have recovered."

What Treatment Worked for Lori?

"In a community newsletter, I found a listing for a counsellor who specializes in eating disorders," she says. "I learned the importance of not just finding a therapist, but the *right* therapist. Mine didn't focus on what I was eating and how many calories I was burning, but dug deeper into why I felt so overwhelmed. This was the beginning of my true recovery, a process that took almost four more years."



Other treatments for eating disorders include help from a nutritionist, medication, self-help, or even hospitalization. The treatment depends on the eating disorder and person - and sometimes people need to try different treatments until they find what works.

"The key to recovery for me was to have a supportive hand to guide me when I faltered, says Lori. "The hardest part was taking one day at a time and having the confidence to know that I was getting better, even when I binged yet again. I often felt like a fragile deer learning how to walk, except I was learning how to eat, treat my body well and respect myself. I am fully recovered today at 26 years old and am living a life I could never have imagined living."

If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, it's important to reach out for help right away. Call the **National Eating Disorder Information Centre** at [1-866-633-4220](tel:1-866-633-4220), or HealthLink BC at 811 or [\(604\) 215-8110](tel:604-215-8110).

Sources and Further Reading

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

[Family Services of the North Shore](#)

[HealthLinkBC](#)

[The National Eating Disorder Information Centre](#)

Lori Henry (interview and excerpts from "[Eating Disorder Personal Story of Recovery](#)" *Flare*, September, 2009).



Written by Laurie Pawlik-Kienlen