



Eating Disorder Education for Dancers, Teachers and Families

Eating Disorder – Signs and Symptoms

Eating disorders (EDs) are life-threatening disorders. Too often the warning signs can be missed and the individual deteriorate quickly. Below are some of the many signs and symptoms you can watch out for to catch EDs early.

Physical signs

- Rapid weight loss or frequent weight changes
- Loss or disturbance of menstruation (female only)
- Decreased libido
- Fainting or dizziness
- Lethargy
- Signs of damage due to vomiting e.g. swelling around the cheeks or jaw, calluses on knuckles, damage to teeth and bad breath
- Feeling cold most of the time

Psychological signs

- Pre-occupation with food, eating, body shape, and weight
- Feeling anxious and/or irritable around meal times
- Feeling 'out of control' around food
- 'Black and white' thinking (e.g. rigid thoughts about food being 'good' or 'bad')
- Distortion in body image
- Using food as self-punishment (e.g. refusing to eat due to depression, stress or other emotional reasons)

Behavioural signs

- Dieting (e.g. fasting, counting calories, avoiding certain food groups such as fats and/or carbohydrates)
- Eating in private and avoiding meals with other people
- Evidence of binge eating (e.g. disappearance and/or hoarding of food)
- Frequent trips to the bathroom during or shortly after meals
- Vomiting or using laxatives, enemas, appetite suppressants or diuretics
- Changes in clothing style (e.g. wearing baggy clothes to hide physical features)
- Compulsive or excessive exercising (e.g. exercising in bad weather, when sick or injured, and/or feeling distressed if exercise is not possible)
- Changes in food preferences (e.g. claiming to dislike foods previously enjoyed)
- Obsessive rituals around food and eating (e.g. eating very slowly, cutting food into very small pieces, insisting that meals are served at exactly the same time every day)
- Extreme sensitivity to comments about body shape, weight, eating and exercise habits
- Secretive behaviour around food (e.g. saying they have eaten when they haven't; hiding uneaten food in their rooms)

Information courtesy: National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC)