

Assessment of Eating Disorders

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There is scientific evidence that, in some cases, symptoms of eating disorders may be accounted for by other psychiatric or physical conditions. Also, prolonged disordered eating may result in severe medical problems (including heart, liver, and kidney malfunction). Therefore, it is recommended in ALL cases of suspected eating disorders that clients schedule a thorough medical evaluation with their family physician or internist and complete a thorough psychological exam (with possible follow-up by a psychiatrist).

Recommended Medical Evaluation

Typically, a physician will use a series of blood analyses and other screening exams to rule out nutritional and medical problems. Laboratory tests may include:

- Complete Blood Count (CBC) with differential
- Urinalysis
- Complete Metabolic Profile: sodium, chloride, potassium, glucose, blood urea
- Nitrogen, Creatinine, Total Protein, Albumin, Globulin, Calcium, Carbon Dioxide, AST, Alkaline Phosphates, Total Bilirubin
- Serum magnesium
- Thyroid Screen (T3, T4, TSH)
- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Estradiol level (or testosterone in males)

In special circumstances of severe weight loss or neurological symptoms, physicians may recommend additional assessments.

Girls who have gone through puberty and women may be advised to schedule a complete gynecological exam, including pelvic exam, especially if disruptions in the menstrual cycle have occurred.

Recommended Psychological Evaluation

Clients presenting with disordered eating or body-image problems should be evaluated for three primary purposes:

1. To diagnose the eating- or body-image-related concerns
2. To assess the possibility of other psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder among others
3. To determine normal life-event or developmental experiences that may be contributing to the presenting symptoms, including bereavement, adjustment to a medical condition, pubertal changes, etc.

There is evidence that eating disorders and many other psychological problems can be treated most effectively with a combination of psychotherapy, family intervention, and (in some cases) medication. If a psychologist determines that medication could be a useful tool in the treatment process, a referral to a psychiatrist will be made. A psychiatrist—a medical doctor with specialized training and experience in psychiatric assessment and treatment—will conduct a thorough medical interview and may decide to prescribe medication and schedule follow-up medication management appointments to monitor the client's adjustment to medication and his/her progress.