

# Bulimia worst over holidays

Most students look forward to holiday vacations as a joyful time for reunions and large family meals; but, for people with eating disorders, these instead may be times for confrontations, lies and painful anxiety.

Bulimia, which is characterized by binge/purge behavior, and anorexia nervosa, a less common but related condition of self-starvation, are dangerous epidemics currently affecting between 25-33 percent of college-aged women (also many men).

Under ordinary circumstances, the lives of these students are dominated by low self-esteem, generalized fear and obsessive thoughts about food. During the holidays, however, these feelings are intensified. With a well-thought-out plan and plenty of motivation, these individuals can use this time off to start a program for recovery.

Although the underlying causes vary, eating disorders typically begin for psychological reasons and become addictive. Most cases are women with unrealistically high expectation of achievement, especially concerning

Lindsey Hall, who cured herself after nine years of bulimia has co-written three booklets on this subject, which are used in more than 500 colleges and universities. She writes in her first booklet, "Eat Without Fear", "I binged up to four and five times a day after the third year. There were very few days without one. My vision often became blurry and I had intense headaches. What used to be passing dizziness and weakness after a binge had become walking into doorjams and exhaustion. My complexion was poor and I was often constipated. Large blood blisters appeared in the back of my mouth. My teeth were a mess." The research study on which her third booklet, "Beating Bulimia," is based, documents other bulimics who were hospitalized, had miscarriages, and spent more than 20 years struggling with food. Between 7-9 percent die due to cardiac arrest, kidney failure, or impaired metabolism.

Dr. Jean Rubel, president of Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders (ANRED), a non-profit organization which serves as a national clearinghouse of information and referrals, observes that college students commonly fall victim to food problems.

Students with food obsessions can use the holiday break from school to begin to get better, though recovery is rarely quick or easy, Rubel recommends that students be aware of the pressures awaiting them at home and make detailed plans for how to cope with them. They should set reasonable goals for themselves, such as planning non-food related activities, perhaps by setting a limit for weight gain, or avoiding specific incidents that may trig-

ger binges. She adds, "If you do slip back into a food behavior, remind yourself it does not mean your plan is not effective. It merely shows you a place to make some revisions so you can more easily achieve your goals."

Most who are cured find that the commitment to getting better is made easier with the important first step of confiding in someone who can help. Vacation time may provide the perfect setting for getting support from friends or family members, who are often understanding and compassionate, despite the sufferer's fears of rejection. However, even with the help of loved ones, overcoming bulimia or anorexia nervosa may require

professional therapy and medical treatment. Without proper attention, the behavior does not suddenly end and can continue for a lifetime.

Lindsey Hall's bulimia developed into a daily habit during her college years, and now she regularly speaks to students who are struggling with food. She emphasizes her success at overcoming bulimia rather than dwelling on her suffering, "I am now able to enjoy growing, touching, tasting, smelling, and eating food without the temptation to binge." Hall asserts, "The best Christmas present that people with eating disorders can give themselves is to make a devoted effort to end their food obsessions."

## Stress seminar offered here

(continued from pg. 1) trap," Gailey said, "because so much of my time belongs to other people and school projects. There's not enough time for myself."

Frequently, stressed-out students over study or study minute details, missing the "big picture" of a class, the study said.

There are, however, several ways to combat stress. A series of meditation exercises can be learned to help relax the mind and body. Stress reduction classes are available free to all students who feel they may need help in dealing with stress, Beck said.

Because final exams are only a few weeks away, Beck offered several tips on how to deal with the stress of preparing for exams.

"Don't stay up all night or take any mind-altering substances because they throw the mind and body out of sync," he said. Beck suggested eating well-balanced meals, exercising to release tension, and finding time to just "veg-out."

"Stress, by definition, is any feeling that causes us to make mistakes. Everybody has some form of stress in their life but learning to cope with it builds new perspectives."

The university study also indicated the need for good college instructors in eliminating much of the excess stress that plagues students.

"Teachers should emphasize excitement about a subject rather than competition," said Spendlove. "Excitement is much more rewarding."

Instructors also should mingle with their students, and get to know them as people, he said.

"By socializing with students," Spendlove explained, "faculty make themselves more approachable, more human."

Instructors should also encourage students to socialize with each other, too, by allowing advanced students to tutor beginners, the study suggested.

## Bulimics often binge on several thousand calories after eating...one bite too many.

their own appearance and weight. The initial binges might be triggered by specific events, such as: moving away from home, rejection by a lover, or family pressures. The behavior

often starts as a way of dieting or in reaction to a failed diet. It becomes a numbing, drug-like coping mechanism that provides instant relief for emotional pain or boredom.

Bulimics often binge on several thousand calories after eating what they feel to be one bite too many at a meal. Since they have eaten more than they "should" anyway, they go ahead and binge, knowing that they will later force themselves to vomit or abuse laxatives. These purges confuse body signals causing extremely low blood sugar levels, electrolyte imbalances, and cravings for more sugary foods. This cycle perpetuates itself, dangerously upsets normal digestion, and further complicates the original psychological reasons for bingeing.

"Students are vulnerable to a cycle of stress inherent in the structure of the school year. There is a separation from home and all that is familiar, anxiety resulting from having to make new friends and learn one's way around campus, plus classwork and studies which pile pressure on top of stress. All the while, women are being vigilant about presenting to the world an immaculate, thin appearance. Many students resort to disordered eating in efforts to gain some peace and release," Rubel says.

"That student returns home," Rubel continues, "perhaps still preoccupied with problems at school, to find a different set of pressures and expectations awaiting. To further complicate matters, holidays are traditionally times of feasting. For someone who is already terrified of weight gain, who is craving rich food after a period of dieting, the prospect of spending time around large amounts of easily available food is frightening indeed."

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