

Diabetes and Eating Disorders

While diabetes does not cause eating disorders, it can set the stage for development of eating disorders. Preoccupation with control of weight, food, and diet is a central issue in both illnesses. Diabetics may feel guilty, anxious or out of control if their blood sugar swings more than a few points. People with eating disorders may feel the same way if their weight fluctuates. Those with both problems may become consumed with strategies to rigidly control both weight and blood sugar.

Because both diabetes and eating disorders involve attention to body states, weight management, and control of food, some people develop a pattern in which they use diabetes to justify or camouflage an eating disorder.

People who take insulin to control diabetes can misuse it to lose weight. If they reduce the required dosage, blood sugar will rise and spill over into the urine, resulting in weight loss. Once diabetics discover they can manipulate their weight in this way, they are reluctant to stop, even when they become aware of dangerous consequences. They decide they can easily blame poorly controlled diabetes for alarming weight loss. That decision can serve as a trigger for a full blown eating disorder.

Diabetes and eating disorders are a dangerous combination. If continued, this combination can lead to life-threatening organ failure. It is important to begin professional treatment early. Treatment usually includes a physician to manage diabetes and the effects of starvation and/or bingeing, a mental health clinician to help define and deal with underlying emotional issues, a family therapist to provide support and teach coping skills to the family, and a dietician to provide nutritional counseling and education.

The good news is that diabetes can be controlled and people can recover from eating disorders. It may be difficult and embarrassing to admit that you, a family member or a friend has been engaging in unhealthy behaviors. It may be even more difficult to let go of effective, yet dangerous weight loss techniques. Don't let these obstacles get in the way of seeking professional help. Talk to your doctor who will conduct a full evaluation and set up a treatment plan that works for you.

Reference: "Diabetes and eating disorders." <http://www.anred.com/diab.html>