

Surviving The Teenage Years - Mom, Am I Too Fat?

By Jan Hittelman

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February is National Eating Disorders Awareness Month. While there hasn't been much media attention on eating disorders recently, according to the experts eating disorders are on the rise. It is estimated that as many as ten percent of teenage girls and young women suffer from an eating disorder like Anorexia or Bulimia, which are the two most frequently diagnosed. Eating disorders also occur in boys, but less often and are probably under diagnosed. More common eating problems among adolescents include: overeating related to tension, poor nutritional habits and food fads. Eating disorders are very difficult to identify, particularly in adolescents, because the sufferer goes to great lengths to hide the illness from friends and family.

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, symptoms of anorexia nervosa and bulimia include the following:

- “A teenager with anorexia nervosa is typically a perfectionist and a high achiever in school. At the same time, she suffers from low self-esteem, irrationally believing she is fat regardless of how thin she becomes. Desperately needing a feeling of mastery over her life, the teenager with anorexia nervosa experiences a sense of control only when she says "no" to the normal food demands of her body. In a relentless pursuit to be thin, the girl starves herself. This often reaches the point of serious damage to the body, and in a small number of cases may lead to death.
- The symptoms of bulimia are usually different from those of anorexia nervosa. The patient binges on huge quantities of high-caloric food and/or purges her body of dreaded calories by self-induced vomiting and often by using laxatives. These binges may alternate with severe diets, resulting in dramatic weight fluctuations. Teenagers may try to hide the signs of throwing up by running water while spending long periods of time in the bathroom. The purging of bulimia presents a serious threat to the patient's physical health, including dehydration, hormonal imbalance, the depletion of important minerals, and damage to vital organs.”

The recently formed Boulder County Eating Disorders Coalition, will be offering a free presentation at Monarch High School on Tuesday, February 28th, from 7:00-9:00pm entitled “ Mom, Am I Too Fat?” This interactive program will feature local experts on eating disorders and offer useful information for parents and teens. To find out more about this event and/or how you can become involved in the Coalition, contact Paula Nelson at 303-880-6030 or pjn6225@yahoo.com.