

Thin Continues To Be “In,” But Eating Disorders Carry Serious Consequences

(NAPSA)—With fad diet crazes, quick weight-loss pills, and sculpted Hollywood stars—the message seems clear: Be thin and win.

Yet alarmingly, being significantly underweight, often caused by eating disorders, can be more dangerous than carrying too many pounds.

“Millions of Americans have an eating disorder that can cause serious health consequences and jeopardize mental well-being,” said Nicole Johnston, MD, a pathologist in Indianapolis, Ind. “In fact, eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness—up to 20 percent of those affected die.”

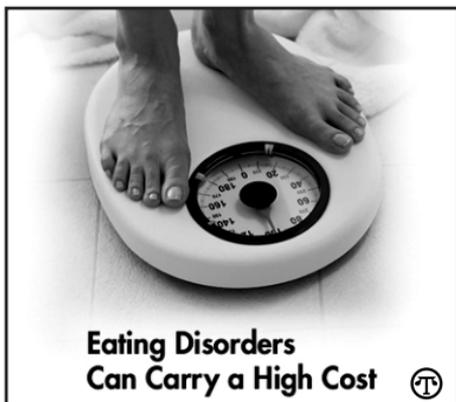
Dr. Johnston is a pathologist, a physician who diagnoses patients with eating disorders through laboratory blood tests. Eating-disordered patients may be anemic; have altered chemistry or thyroid levels and electrolytes; have poor renal (kidney) function; or, in women, have fertility problems.

“Statistically, women suffer more than men from eating disorders,” Dr. Johnston said. “Ninety percent of those diagnosed are adolescent or adult women. But eating disorders aren’t just a ‘women’s problem.’ Men are increasingly preoccupied with both body type and weight, so they can also develop unhealthy body images and dangerous shape-control practices.”

Anorexia nervosa—a form of self-starvation that leads to emaciation—affects one in 100 girls between the ages of 16 and 18. Bulimia nervosa—characterized by binge-eating followed by self-induced vomiting and/or excessive exercise to prevent weight gain—afflicts four out of 100 college-aged women.

Clinical symptoms of anorexia include:

- Profound weight loss or fail-



ure to maintain expected age or gender weight

- Brittle bones from bone loss
- Lowered illness resistance
- Digestive problems
- Dehydration that can lead to kidney failure
- Fainting and low blood pressure

Clinical symptoms of bulimia include:

- Dehydration that can lead to irregular heartbeats and even death
- Inflamed esophagus, which can burst or lead to precancerous lesions
- Tooth and gum problems
- Bowel irregularities
- Vitamin and mineral deficiency
- Chronic kidney disease.

Socially, people with eating disorders often have low self-esteem, are depressed, feel isolated or guilty, and remain focused on their appearance as opposed to participating in many aspects of life.

The good news is that with treatment, about 60 percent of people with eating disorders recover. Another 20 percent struggle with the diseases throughout their lives.

Visit the College of American Pathologists at www.cap.org for more information about disease prevention.