

Clinical Characteristics of Anorexia and Bulimia

In order to make a diagnosis of anorexia or bulimia, a psychologist or psychiatrist needs to know what the characteristics or **symptoms** of the disorders are. Psychological problems can have many symptoms, and to simplify a complex picture, psychologists divide symptoms into different groups. These are:

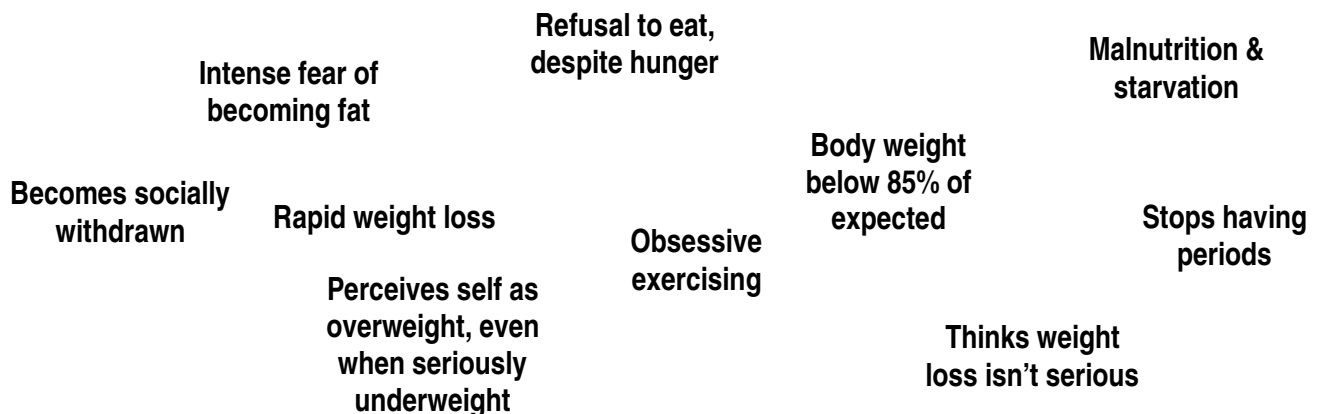


- Emotional (or *affective*) symptoms. These are disturbances or abnormalities in the way a person **feels**.
- Cognitive symptoms. These are disturbances or abnormalities in a person's ability to **think rationally** or perceive the world as it really is.
- Behavioural symptoms. These are disturbances or abnormalities in what a person **does**.
- Physical symptoms. These are problems or changes in the **body's biological functioning**.

Below are the symptoms of anorexia and bulimia nervosa. The symptoms are all mixed up. Look at each symptom and decide whether it is emotional, cognitive, behavioural or physical. Then list the symptoms of each disorder under four headings to come up with a clear description of both disorders. Then summarise and make short notes on the **prevalence data** that describes how common each disorder is and who it mainly affects.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia occurs in about 0.5% of the adolescent population. Ten times as many girls are affected as boys, and the commonest age of onset is between 15-17 years. Up to 1% of 17 year-old girls may be affected. 8% of sufferers die within 5 years of onset. About 70% of sufferers make a full recovery within 10 years of onset. The remainder continue to struggle with some degree of disordered eating.



Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia is more common than anorexia, with about 3% of the young female population affected. Like anorexia, it is rare in young men. Its usual age of onset is later than for anorexia (late teens to early twenties). About 70% of sufferers recover fully or partially within 10 years of onset.

