

# Anorexia & Bulimia

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

An Excerpt from the *BIBLICAL COUNSELING KEYS*

### What is Anorexia?

- **Anorexia** is an eating disorder characterized by compulsive, chronic self-starvation with a refusal to maintain a body weight within 15% of a person's normal weight.
- **Anorexics** weigh far less than what should be their normal body weight, which is different for every person, based on age, height, gender, bone structure, and muscle mass. Body weight that is 15% below normal poses a serious threat to physical health.
- **Anorexia Nervosa** is an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat even though a person is dangerously underweight (at least 15% below normal).

*"Someone may be chastened on a bed of pain  
with constant distress in their bones,  
so that their body finds food repulsive  
and their soul loathes the choicest meal.  
Their flesh wastes away to nothing,  
and their bones, once hidden, now stick out."  
(Job 33:19–21)*

### What Is Bulimia?

- **Bulimia** is a psychological eating disorder characterized by repeated or sporadic "binge and purge" episodes.
- **Bulimics** practice a strict diet with intervals of binge eating—consuming large amounts of food in a short period of time. They then practice self-induced vomiting, or abuse laxatives or diuretics.

*"Their destiny is destruction,  
their god is their stomach,  
and their glory is in their shame.  
Their mind is set on earthly things."  
(Philippians 3:19)*

### Characteristics of Those with Eating Disorders

- **Confusion** over values
- **Deception** of self and others

- **Depression** over feeling "fat" (although weight is normal or far below—even to the point of looking like "skin and bones")
- **Compulsion** for some feeling of control
- **Loneliness** because of the desire to avoid discovery
- **Low self-worth** because personal value is based on appearance
- **Perfectionism** because they believe that everything must fit just right, or it's horrible
- **People pleasing** with an excessive desire for approval

*"Guide me in your truth and teach me."  
(Psalm 25:5)*

### Situational Causes

- **Feeling worthless** because of abuse in the home
- **Feeling inadequate** because of unrealistic expectations of others
- **Feeling driven** in a high performance atmosphere
- **Feeling hopeless** as a result of depression from past behaviors
- **Feeling powerless** because of obesity or other eating disorder in the family
- **Feeling angry** because of past mistreatment
- **Feeling anxious** due to stressful life changes

*"I loathe my very life;  
therefore I will give free rein  
to my complaint  
and speak out in the  
bitterness of my soul."  
(Job 10:1)*

### Key Verse to Memorize

*"The LORD himself goes before you  
and will be with you;  
he will never leave you nor forsake you.  
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."  
(Deuteronomy 31:8)*

## Key Passage to Read

Psalm 139:1–18, 23–24

### How to First Acknowledge 7 Key Needs

1. **Agree** to get a thorough medical checkup. This condition is life-threatening! (Proverbs 27:12)
2. **Acquire** as much knowledge about eating disorders as possible—for yourself and for those close to you. (Proverbs 15:22)
3. **Attend** weekly (or regular) sessions with a knowledgeable, professional, Christian counselor. (Proverbs 23:12)
4. **Admit** your inability to control your eating pattern. (Romans 7:15)
5. **Abandon** the idea that you just need more willpower. This is not a diet or willpower problem, but a battle to address strongholds. (2 Corinthians 10:4–5)
6. **Allow** yourself to forgive those who have hurt you ... and even to forgive yourself. (Colossians 3:13)
7. **Act** in total faith on God's power to rescue you. (Psalm 71:1–3)

*“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*  
(Philippians 4:19)

### The Way to Freedom

- **Recognize** that you have an eating disorder.
- **Acknowledge** your need.
- **Get** professional help.
- **Discover** your past predispositions.
- **Identify** your present stressors.
- **Avoid** your destructive patterns.
- **Flee** your enticing triggers.
- **Resist** your compelling urges.

### The Way to Sustained Freedom

- **Yield** yourself to God. (James 4:7)
- **Claim** your victory in Christ. (Romans 6:13)

- **Picture** your success. (Philippians 3:20–21)
- **Replace** lies with truth. (2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 7:1)
- **Devise** a plan for daily success. (2 Chronicles 26:5)
- **Enlist** the support of others. (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10; Proverbs 27:9)
- **Throw** away your scales. (Colossians 2:8)
- **Journal** your journey. (Deuteronomy 11:18–20)

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”*  
(Galatians 5:1)

### Dos & Don'ts for Family and Friends

#### Here Are the Dos ...

- **Do** ... Learn everything you can. (Proverbs 19:20)
- **Do** ... Confront in a loving way. (Proverbs 12:18)
- **Do** ... Seek professional help for the one in need. (Proverbs 13:10)
- **Do** ... Talk about emotions, striving to reach deeper levels of communication. (Proverbs 20:5)
- **Do** ... Listen, listen, listen. (Ecclesiastes 3:7)
- **Do** ... Verbalize your genuine heartfelt love. (Ephesians 4:29)
- **Do** ... Be honest about the dangers. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
- **Do** ... Pray faithfully. (James 5:16)

#### And Here Are the Don'ts ...

- **Don't** be forceful or controlling. (Proverbs 16:24)
- **Don't** be unrealistic about your expectations for change. (Proverbs 19:11)
- **Don't** let anorexics see the numbers on the scale when being weighed. (Proverbs 16:21)
- **Don't** expect rejoicing by an anorexic struggler at putting on needed weight. (Romans 12:2)
- **Don't** fail to request help from a former anorexic. (Proverbs 27:17)

- Don't stock or eat "trigger" or unhealthy foods in your home if an anorexic or bulimic lives with you. (Matthew 6:13)
- Don't compliment positive changes in body weight by saying, "You look healthy." (Romans 15:2)
- Don't give up. (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7-8)

## Questions and Answers

***"Isn't it good to eliminate all food until I lose all the weight I want?"***

No, because not eating ENOUGH hurts your metabolism by slowing it down!

When you drop your calories too low, you will lose weight, but that weight is certainly not all from fat. You will lose water weight, but more importantly, you will lose muscle weight. Your muscle is what burns the fat in your body, even at rest.

How much better is a *healthy, balanced, disciplined diet* that results in slow weight loss and keeps your surplus weight gone for good? The Bible says ...

*"Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding."*

(Proverbs 15:32)

***"What roles do ego and vanity play in anorexia?"***

None. Anorexics eat less and less in an effort to become smaller and smaller because of their self-effacing desire to simply disappear. Deep-seated insecurity, not vanity, is at the root of anorexia. This Scripture reflects the typical feelings of the anorexic struggler ...

*"Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!*

*I would fly away and be at rest."*

(Psalm 55:6)

***"Why do anorexics seem so determined to destroy themselves?"***

The negative thinking patterns of anorexics have convinced them that ...

- They don't deserve to live.
- Their natural longing for love is not realistic.
- They have made too many mistakes.

*"Hope deferred makes the heart sick."*

(Proverbs 13:12)

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