

**Warning Signs of Eating Disorders**

Eating disorders can catch families unaware. When you are in the hospital, your healthcare team may diagnose your child with an eating disorder. Your healthcare team may say that your child does not meet criteria for an eating disorder and that there is another explanation for their weight loss. We want all families to be prepared to identify an eating disorder. We know that weight loss or failure to gain weight can cause an eating disorder in the future, even if your child was not diagnosed in the hospital.

**Here are signs or “red flags” that your child might be developing an eating disorder:**

- Weight loss. Your child is growing and developing. They should be gaining weight until their early 20s. Weight loss is a warning sign for several different medical and psychiatric disorders.
- Cutting out food groups or types of food, focusing on eating “healthy” or “clean eating”
  - Reducing or eliminating carbohydrates
  - Reducing or eliminating fats
  - Becoming a vegetarian or vegan
  - Reducing or eliminating desserts
  - Reducing or eliminating snack food
- Skipping meals
- Insisting to eat alone or in room, refusing to eat with others
- Getting full quickly, reporting stomach pains or upset
- Increased attention to meal planning, baking, or cooking and refusing to eat what was prepared
- Increasing exercise (even if it is “to get healthy”)
  - Adding more time or days to their normal routine
  - If an athlete, adding more time to their training schedule
  - Feeling guilty if exercise is missed
  - Exercising even though sick or injured
  - Missing activities to exercise
  - Sneaking or hiding exercise
- Frequent body checking in mirrors
- Going to the bathroom immediately after meals
- Wearing loose or baggy clothing
- Withdrawal from friends, reduction in or dropping out of extracurricular activities
- Getting dizzy when standing
- For biological girls, irregular or stopping of menses (period)
- Feeling cold all the time
- Difficulty in falling or staying asleep
- Saying that they feel tired no matter how much they sleep
- Erosion of enamel on the teeth (may be a sign of vomiting)
- Dry skin, nails, and hair
- Light hair growth along the entire body