Anorexia has highest mortality rate of all psychiatric illnesses; CHS students struggle to combat its effects

Juniors Sara Stockholm knew something was seriously wrong the second she stood up and felt like she was about to faint. It was the end of her freshman year, and she hadn’t exercised or worked out at all during the day. Instead, she knew she had another, much more serious and deep-rooted problem. For the past few months, she had limited her dietary intake to 800 or even 300 calories a day. Her meals consisted of nothing at all, or at most, an apple and a cup of tea, while her days consisted of a fanatical obsession with calorie tracking.

“That feeling was draining and it’s still draining to think about today, especially when that feeling resurfaces. It was draining, emotionally and physically and mentally and everything. I got referred to a therapist after I was basically found in a pile of my own blood from my own self-harm,” Stockholm said.

Stockholm is one of the 1.5 million females in the United States suffering from anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder categorized by a compulsive obsession with weight, size and low self-esteem. She said that for her, the disease surfaced freshman year as a result of...
Symptoms

**Anorexia Nervosa**
- Obsessive fear of weight gain
- Purposive reduction of caloric intake

**Bulimia Nervosa**
- Episodes of overeating followed by "purging" or vomiting

**Binge Eating Disorder**
- Episodes of overeating marked by distress or lack of control

### EATING ADVOCATES

**DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES**
Princess Diana spoke publicly about her struggles with bulimia in 1994, which gave many the courage to start talking about their own eating disorders. She continued to fight to increase public awareness about eating disorders.

**DEMI LOVATO**
Lovato has become an unofficial spokesperson for young women with eating disorders after being treated herself for anorexia and bulimia in 2010. She now uses her fitness routine to help manage her bipolar disorder.

**LADY GAGA**
In 2010, Lady Gaga revealed that she has struggled with anorexia and bulimia since the age of 15. Her Born This Way Foundation connects young people with resources to help with issues such as body image, bullying, drug and alcohol use, and more.

**RUSSELL BRAND**
Actor and comedian Russell Brand has spoken about his struggles with bulimia and substance abuse as a teenager. He once said in an interview, “Having an eating disorder was really unusual in boys, quite embarrassing. But I found it euphoric.”

### COMMON EATING DISORDERS

**Anorexia Nervosa**
- Extreme thinness
- Dry and yellowish skin
- Brittle hair and nails

**Bulimia Nervosa**
- Chronically sore throat
- Decaying and/or stained teeth
- Severe dehydration

**Binge Eating Disorder**
- Feeling ashamed about eating
- Unable to stop eating
- Eating large amounts of food at a time
Take a look at the negative health effects of anorexia on the human body.

**BRAIN AND NERVES:** lack of awareness, lack of information, higher risk for heart attack, stroke, other heart complications.

**MUSCLES AND JOINTS:** muscles become weaker, joints become swollen, higher risk for fractures and osteoporosis.

**SKIN:** bruises easily, skin dark, growth of fine hair all over body, yellow skin, brittle nails, gets cold easily.

**HORMONES:** periods stop, loss of bone, potential growing problems, trouble getting pregnant, higher risk for miscarriage, higher risk for postpartum depression and baby with low birth weight.

**HAIR:** hair becomes thin and brittle as a result of a lack of the right nutrients needed to sustain growth or a lack of food in general.

**HEART:** poor circulation, low blood pressure, slow heart rate, heart palpitations (fluttering, low blood pressure), higher risk for heart failure, risk of heart failure, cardiac arrest.

**JOINTS:** muscles become weak, risk of heart failure, cardiac arrest.

**MUSCLES AND JOINTS:** muscles become weaker, joints become swollen, higher risk for fractures and osteoporosis.

**SKIN:** bruises easily, skin dark, growth of fine hair all over body, yellow skin, brittle nails, gets cold easily.

**HORMONES:** periods stop, loss of bone, potential growing problems, trouble getting pregnant, higher risk for miscarriage, higher risk for postpartum depression and baby with low birth weight.

Finally, there are programs that are residential, and that’s the highest level of care where they would go live and stay in one unit specifically for eating disorders for a month or more.

**Therapy sessions for adolescents specifically are unique because they emphasize parent involvement, with over 25 percent of a session consisting of time with both the patient and his or her parents. Treatments for adolescents also differ from adults because sometimes, they need permission slips to eat snacks in school, have different FEAT-approved medications and usually work on relationships with parents during the sessions.**

To Edgerton, one of the most important factors is catching the disorder early. She said, “If I could think of one thing to share, it would be to seek help as early as possible because the farther an eating disorder gets or how much time goes on with the struggling with an eating disorder, the longer it takes to get it to me.”

Sometimes, I have parents call in and ask about bringing their child in for self-examination issues, and there aren’t any eating issues yet. I always recommend that they do, just because eating disorders are a lot (to deal with). The rates of them are a lot higher now just because of the media teenagers are exposed to.

Stockholm said that now, as an advocate for eating disorder awareness, she agrees that seeking treatment is one of the most important steps. She said, “People need support for this thing. It’s not really something you can do by yourself; you definitely need someone to help you. ‘I don’t want to sound cheesy, but (if you are struggling with an eating disorder) reach out to one of your friends or something because I know it’s scary to talk to an adult, and be like, ‘Hey, I’m doing this.’ Instead, talk to one of your friends and be like, ‘Hey, I don’t think this is a healthy habit that I had, can you help me with this?’”

One of the biggest complications among those that suffer from eating disorders results from secrecy and hiding. Edgerton said she believes it’s not always that the patient is lying or trying to hide from others, but is denying her or his disorder to themselves. She said, “A lot of times they go unnoticed, so if you know your friend has one, if you think your sister has one, tell your parents, tell your guidance counselor, because you don’t want that to go on for them. Eating disorders are the deadliest of the mental health issues. It really is a life-death issue, so if someone finds out they have an eating disorder, they need help.”

Yasmine Pehlivan, vice president of the Mental Health Awareness and junior, said anorexia, like all mental illnesses, is not as recognized as it should be. She said, “Most people don’t really know or pay attention to mental illnesses, so we just try to reinforce a positive attitude at school.”

Last year, the club wrote positive messages on notes and displayed them around the school. Pehlivan said this was in an effort to boost students’ self-esteem and make them feel like someone cared about them.

On her part, Edgerton said she thinks awareness for eating disorders has improved, but there is still a long way to go.

“Karen Carpenter, a singer, she actually died from an eating disorder, from a heart complication, which is actually one of the biggest risks for anorexia. When that happened (in 1983), no one knew what an eating disorder was. I would say we’ve come a long way since then, but I would definitely want it to improve even more, just to where people wouldn’t be embarrassed to talk about it.”

Edgerton said, “For a lot of my clients, if they have to leave school or early or leave for like a lunch period, we spend time talking about what they’re going to tell their friends and that they’re embarrassed if people are going to know, and I think that’s really sad. No one gets embarrassed going to the dentist in the middle of the school day, and an eating disorder is not something you choose to have, so no one should be embarrassed about it.”

Stockholm said as someone that has and is still suffering from anorexia, she has found a lot of gaps in other people’s knowledge or perception of eating disorders. She said, “I want people to acknowledge that (eating-disorders) are a thing and people aren’t just attention-seeking. I want people to acknowledge that guys can have them too, and it’s not actually an issue; it’s not just a cute little mental health thing. Some people romanticize things like this and it’s not, it’s not cute. It’s a lot more serious than you think. It’s not just a diet that people go on, like ‘I’m just going to go on a diet and exercise to lose a little weight.’ I’m obsessive, where you’re constantly looking at calories and logging calories for things.”

Stockholm said she wants to emphasize that healing is not linear. She said, “I’m not cured. I’m not better. This isn’t something that doesn’t affect me anymore. This still affects me constantly, it’s still something I have to deal with every single day.”