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Humanities - ¾

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**Does This \_\_\_\_ Make Me Look Fat?**

15% of teens who are diagnosed with anorexia nervosa will die from that disorder this year (Smith). Anorexia nervosa is one of many illnesses that are more commonly known as eating disorders. Eating disorders are commonly misconceived as physical illnesses, but in reality, they are mental diseases. The leading eating disorders are anorexia (where a person does not eat), bulimia (where a person vomits up every meal they eat), and binge-eating (where a person starts eating and cannot stop). Because of the unrealistic body and beauty messages that the media portrays and the stress put upon teens, eating disorders are becoming more common. Therefore, in order to prevent the mental and physical harm that eating disorders cause, society must educate teens on better ways to deal with stress and refer all teens struggling with eating disorders to medical attention in order to not only prevent, but to end, eating disorders in teens.

Teens develop eating disorders for a myriad of reasons including stress and the strive to obtain the media’s view of an “ideal body image”. For example, “Instead, sufferers use food and unhealthy behaviours like dieting, starving, bingeing and purging to cope with unpleasant and overwhelming emotions and stressful situations. At least in the short term, these behaviours relieve anxiety and stress” (“Why Do Young Adults”). This quote shows that teens often use food or lack of food to cope with stressful situations. They believe that eating foods that generally make them happy will temporarily relieve them of their stress. However, this is not the only cause of eating disorders in teens. For instance, “The mass media surrounds us with images of the “thin ideal” for females, an ideal that has become increasingly thin since the 1950’s and thus increasingly unrealistic for most girls and women. The messages and images that focus on the value of appearances and thinness for females have a significant negative impact on body satisfaction, weight preoccupation, eating patterns, and the emotional well-being of women in western culture” (Spettigue and Henderson). This quote proves that teens are developing eating disorders because of the unrealistic body images that the media sends. When teens see the exceptionally slim body “normalities” in magazines, movies, TV shows, advertisements, and other forms of media, they work to achieve it in an effort to fit in with their peers and society. The media’s view of an “ideal body image” and stress are just two of the reasons teens develop eating disorders.

Although there are many negative effects caused by teen eating disorders, the most prominent are depression and physical damage to their bodies. For instance, “Depression is often associated with eating disorders [and] sometimes hard to say which came first - an eating disorder can certainly cause depression and the reverse is also true” (Smith). This quote proves that teens are likely to develop depression because of an eating disorder. Eating disorders become an addiction to teens, and when a person has an addiction, it can control their life, minimizing happiness and making typical everyday endeavors difficult to get through. Unfortunately, this is not the only negative effect of eating disorders on teens. Physical issues usually accompany the mental challenges. Physical issues can include, “Vomiting up blood, calluses on their knuckles from sticking their fingers down their throat, “horrific” dental erosion and tears in the esophagus” (Smith). This quote shows some of the physical harm teens endure from eating disorders. When teens refuse to eat, or forcefully throw up what they do eat, they are harming their bodies by preventing vital nutrients from entering their body’s systems, therefore suffering physical harm such as calluses, organ problems, deterioration of their teeth, tears in their esophagus and so much more. Depression and physical harm are just two of the many negative effects teens encounter from eating disorders.

Therapy and meeting with a nutritionist are two of the most effective solutions in treating teen eating disorders. For instance, “Individual and group therapy can help your loved one explore the issues underlying the eating disorder, improve self-esteem, and learn healthy ways of responding to stress and emotional pain. Family therapy is also effective for dealing with the impact the eating disorder has on the entire family unit” (Smith, Robinson and Segal). This quote illustrates that therapy not only helps the teen who suffers from an eating disorder understand what the disorder is doing to their body, but it also helps them to understand how their disorder affects the people around them. It is often difficult for teens to communicate how they feel, so when they are put into an environment with someone who cares and understands what they are dealing with, they feel safe enough to talk about their problems including eating disorders, rendering therapy as a viable solution to teen eating disorders. However, therapy is not the only solution to eating disorders in teens. For example, “Dieticians or nutritionists are often involved in the treatment of eating disorders. They can help your loved one design meal plans, set dietary goals, and achieve a healthy weight. Nutritional counseling may also involve education about basic nutrition and the health consequences of eating disorders” (Smith, Robinson and Segal). This quote shows that teens can benefit from meeting with a nutritionist along with therapy and other treatment, in order to learn to eat healthily again. When a teen has been eating incorrectly for a long period of time, it is nearly impossible to remember what healthy eating looks like. Nutritionists specialize in teaching people how to eat properly, from grocery shopping to a schedule and portion size. Therefore, visiting a nutritionist proves to be a vital step in overcoming an eating disorder. Two of the most effective solutions for teens overcoming eating disorders are therapy and meeting with a nutritionist.

Unless society stops promoting unrealistic beauty and body images and putting a ridiculous amount of stress on teens, they will continue to suffer from physical and mental problems associated with, or caused by, eating disorders, leaving therapy as a necessary solution. Teen eating disorders can develop for many reasons, but the unrealistic body and beauty images the media portray and stress are two primary causes. Physical harm to the teen’s body and depression are the most severe effects that result from eating disorders. Therapy, specifically group and meeting with a nutritionist, are two of the best solutions to eating disorders in teens. By learning about teenage eating disorders, all people can help teens suffering from eating disorders by referring them to proper help, as well as learn to identify the signs of eating disorders so they can educate those at risk of developing eating disorders.

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