



Charlie Crist  
Governor

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Secretary of Health

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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Feb. 25 – Mar. 3 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week*  
**Know the Health Dangers of Eating Disorders**

Eating disorders are real, complex and devastating conditions that can have serious consequences on your health, productivity and relationships. Eating disorders are not just a “fad” or a “phase.” They are serious, potentially life-threatening conditions that affect a person’s emotional and physical health.

People struggling with an eating disorder need to seek professional help. The earlier a person with an eating disorder seeks treatment, the greater the likelihood of physical and emotional recovery.

For this reason, the Pinellas County Health Department recognizes Feb. 25 – Mar. 3 as **National Eating Disorders Awareness Week** (NEDAW). Now in its 20th year, NEDAW is the largest eating disorders outreach effort in the U.S. It is intended to raise awareness and increase prevention, as well as educate the public that eating disorders are illnesses, not choices.

**Health Risks of Anorexia Nervosa:**

In anorexia nervosa’s cycle of self-starvation, the body is denied the essential nutrients it needs to function normally. Thus, the body is forced to slow down all of its processes to conserve energy.

- Abnormally slow heart rate and low blood pressure, which mean that the heart muscle is changing. The risk for heart failure rises as the heart rate and blood pressure levels sink lower and lower.
- Reduction of bone density (osteoporosis), which results in dry, brittle bones.
- Muscle loss and weakness
- Severe dehydration, which can result in kidney failure.
- Fainting, fatigue, and overall weakness.
- Dry hair and skin; hair loss is common.
- Growth of a downy layer of hair called lanugo all over the body, in an effort to keep the body warm

**Health Risks of Bulimia Nervosa**

The recurrent binge-and-purge cycles of bulimia can affect the entire digestive system and can lead to electrolyte and chemical imbalances in the body that affect the heart and other major organ functions.

- Electrolyte imbalances that can lead to irregular heartbeats and possibly heart failure and death.
- Potential for gastric rupture during periods of bingeing.
- Inflammation and possible rupture of the esophagus from frequent vomiting.
- Tooth decay and staining from stomach acids released during frequent vomiting.
- Chronic irregular bowel movements and constipation as a result of laxative abuse.
- Peptic ulcers and pancreatitis.

**(MORE)**

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**Health Risks of Binge Eating Disorder:**

Binge eating disorder often results in many of the same health risks associated with clinical obesity.

- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol levels.
- Heart disease
- Type II diabetes mellitus.
- Gallbladder disease.

**Eating disorders are illnesses with a biological basis**, modified and influenced by emotional and cultural factors. The stigma associated with eating disorders has long kept individuals suffering in silence, inhibited funding for crucial research and created barriers to treatment. Because of insufficient information many people fail to recognize the dangerous consequences of eating disorders.

While eating disorders are serious, potentially life threatening illnesses, there is help available and **recovery is possible**.

**For more information or to get treatment, visit [www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org), [www.edreferral.com](http://www.edreferral.com) or [www.nationaleatingdisorders.com](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.com)**

**National Eating Disorders Association  
Information & Help Line: 1-800-931-2237**

*The Mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of our community through public and private partnerships in an environment that respects diversity.*  
[www.PinellasHealth.com](http://www.PinellasHealth.com)