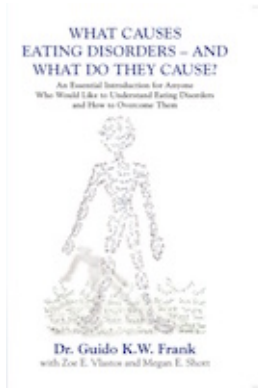


WHAT CAUSES EATING DISORDERS – AND WHAT DO THEY CAUSE?

An Essential Introduction for Anyone
Who Would Like to Understand Eating Disorders
and How to Overcome Them



Dr. Guido K.W. Frank
with Zoe E. Vlastos and Megan E. Shott



Eating disorders come in various forms. Their presentations range from the emaciated individual with anorexia nervosa, to the person with bulimia nervosa who eats large amount of food (“binge eat”) only to throw those up, to individuals with binge eating disorder, and there are also many in-between states of disordered eating.

For most, the existence of eating disorders is difficult to understand, because isn't eating the most natural thing of the world? And it is true that eating disorders, at least on first sight, have little rational explanation to them.

This book describes distinct paths and reasons for someone to develop an eating disorder. We provide a model that takes into account biological, psychological, and social factors that influence the development of different eating disorder types. We describe vulnerabilities to develop an eating

disorder, as well as changes that occur during the illness that can complicate recovery. The book also describes what we know about the brain in eating disorders and how we can make sense of eating disorder behaviors from a biological perspective. We also review treatment approaches that have shown benefits, and present personal accounts from individuals who have had an eating disorder, describing their way to recovery.

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First Edition

1. Introduction - The Unusual Problem

‘I know seventy-seven pounds is low but I’m not happy now with the way I am. I want to be a lot less.’ This is a testimonial from a woman with anorexia nervosa explaining why she cannot eat enough to maintain a normal body weight (1). Other individuals with eating disorders may never have had a good sense of appetite or satiety and cannot stop eating some or all of the time, even if they try to do so. Some children may tell you that they have been feeling uncomfortable in their body since they can remember. One girl who came to me for treatment at the age of 12 years old told me that she started searching the Internet for thin bodies when she was only four years old. For others the eating disorder developed over the course of a few months when just trying to lose a few pounds and be more physically fit.

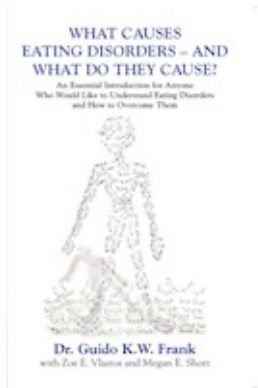
Eating disorders come in various forms. The presentations of eating disorders range from the severely emaciated individual with anorexia nervosa, to the person with bulimia nervosa who restricts eating but then frequently loses control and eats large amount of food (“binge eat”) only to throw those up, to those individuals with binge eating disorder who binge eat without methods to rid themselves of the food eaten. Importantly, there are also many in-between states of disordered eating. For instance a newly identified group has so called purging disorder, that are individuals who may eat normal amounts of food but use self induced

vomiting, or laxatives to avoid weight gain or to lose weight. Although many individuals may not fit exactly into an eating disorder category, they may nevertheless suffer greatly from the eating disorder and the often-associated depression and anxiety.

For most, the existence of eating disorders is difficult to understand, because isn't eating the most natural thing of the world? And it is true that eating disorders, at least on first sight, have little rational explanation to them. Later when we describe and discuss brain biology, you will see that from a biological perspective it may become very difficult to reverse course after being caught in a severe eating disorder. Eating disorder behavior at times can be seen as a self-directed attempt to manage stress, feelings and other problems, however, from a perspective of reason there are typically more effective ways to get emotional relieve. Why one person develops an eating disorder while another gets "only" depression or an anxiety disorder is unknown though, although certain temperament or psychological traits may be risk factors for developing eating disorders.

In this guide we will discuss eating disorders in their path from early onset to full development and recovery. We will explore and describe how someone may present with an eating disorder and the distinct paths and reasons that may result in similar presentations of anorexia or bulimia nervosa or another eating disorder. We will explain the concept of the

“perfect storm,” which we have developed to help understand eating disorders. In short, the perfect storm model takes into account the biological, psychological, and social factors that influence the development and expression of different eating disorder types. We will explore vulnerabilities to develop an eating disorder, as well as possible changes that might occur during the illness and complicate recovery. We will spend time describing what we know about the brain in eating disorders and how we can make sense of eating disorder behaviors from a biological perspective. Often, it takes a combination of interventions to help a child or an adult to overcome an eating disorder. We will review treatment approaches that have shown benefits. In summary, in this book we hope to present a comprehensive view of presentation, underlying mechanism, and treatment approaches of eating disorders in order to further understanding, increase empathy with individuals with eating disorders, and help patients and their families on the path of recovery.



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