

## Bulimia and anorexia are 'two sides of same coin'



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**By Melody Ng**

SINGAPORE - Bulimia and anorexia are "really two sides of the same coin", says Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist at Dr BL Lim Centre For Psychological Wellness.

Though anorexia may seem physically more dangerous as it involves depriving oneself of food, bulimia can also cause a myriad of physical problems, he said.

They include "electrolyte imbalance, cardiovascular problems like irregular rhythm, digestive issues and throat and mouth problems".

Dr Lim believes the profiles of patients with the disorders are "very much the same" as it is the same illness being presented differently and at different times. Most patients develop bulimia after an anorexia episode.

However, the need for hospitalisation is often lower in bulimia. Medication like anti-depressants can help curb the urge of bingeing and purging, unlike in anorexia.

"Psychotherapy is an important component of treatment in both (disorders)," he said.

Dr Lim said a common reason for bulimia is the way the media portrays and idealises a slim physique.

He warns parents to be wary if their children start getting secretive about their meals.

melodyng@sph.com.sg

Repeated episodes of binge eating and purging

Feeling out of control during a binge and eating beyond the point of comfortable fullness

Purging after a binge (typically by self-induced vomiting, or abusing laxatives, diet pills and/or diuretics)

Frequent dieting

Extreme concern with body weight and shape

Damaged teeth and gums

Swollen salivary glands in the cheeks

Sores in the throat and mouth

Source: Health Promotion Board



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