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Muslim Women's League

Islamic Principles: Self Control and Self Worth

A Deeper Sense of Worth

Although we have been instructed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the importance of maintaining a good physical appearance, we are encouraged to focus more on our inner selves rather than merely our looks. That is why he said in a hadith, "Verily Allah does not look to your faces and your wealth, but He looks to your heart and to your deeds."

The Power of Fasting

There is no doubt that talking about controlling one's eating is much easier than actually doing it. However, Islam provides us with ways of gradually strengthening our self control. Take fasting, for example. In addition to improving one's overall health through cleansing the body and allowing the digestive system to rest, it actually increases a person's self control. When someone fasts, the act of avoiding food and drink becomes a form of training for the person, as her soul is forced to suppress her desires. Thus, if a woman feels overwhelmed by her desire for food, she can tame these feelings by choosing to fast regularly (e.g. twice a week or a few days each month) in order to increase her self control. As with any difficulty, asking Allah for help while making an effort to change it will make the challenge less difficult to overcome.

Offering Help

If you know someone who you believe is suffering from an eating disorder, it is important that she gets professional help as soon as possible. In a caring manner, let her know that you are concerned about her and would like to offer help. Be ready for all possible reactions such as anger, denial, and shame. On the other hand, she may be relieved that someone has offered to help. Be sensitive to the person and keep things confidential because the issue may be embarrassing to her. If she refuses to get help, then wait. It may be that she has not yet realized how serious her disorder has gotten. Continue to monitor her, and step in to help when you feel the time is right. She will need to receive both medical and psychological help, so try to contact her doctor immediately. This brochure also provides you with resources to assist you. The sooner you lend a hand, the more you will be able to alleviate her suffering.

Eating Disorders: Their Dangers



An eating disorder is a dangerous disease that can not be ignored. Its effects on an individual can be devastating, both psychologically and physically, not to mention the negative effects it has on the person's family and loved ones. Although eating disorders are rarely talked about in our community, they do exist, and they require immediate medical attention. It is important to learn the signs and effects of this disorder so that the sufferers can receive adequate help before it is too late.

• Helpful Resources •

• Take-Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS)
(800) 932-8677



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What is an Eating Disorder?

In the Quran, Allah mentions that He has provided a wide variety of food and drink for mankind to enjoy. He also provided us with guidelines on how to use them. *“Oh you who believe, do not hold as unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful to you, and do not exceed the bounds of what is right. Allah does not love those who transgress the bounds of right. Eat of the things which Allah has provided for you, lawful and good; but fear Allah, in Whom you believe.”* (Quran 5:87-88)



While being instructed to enjoy the foods that are lawful to eat, we are expected to show our gratitude to Allah by eating in moderation – neither too much nor too little.

Someone who suffers from an eating disorder crosses these limits of normal food consumption by either eating way too much food or by nearly starving one's self. No matter which type of eating disorder one may have, it is much more complex than just an inability to eat normal portions of food. An eating disorder is a sign that the person is struggling with an underlying psychological problem.

Of those affected by eating disorders, 90% of them are adolescent and young women. That is why these disorders must be taken very seriously by women.

Types of Eating Disorders

Although eating disorders are not limited to these three categories, the most common types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is defined as an inaccurate perception of one's body image, a fear of gaining weight, and eating patterns that do not support a normal body weight. Typical symptoms of anorexia include a refusal to eat, significant weight loss, a bizarre preoccupation with food, excessive exercise, a distorted body image, induced vomiting, and/ or cessation (stopping) of or irregular menstrual periods (amenorrhea).

It is believed that environmental as well as biological and psychological factors trigger this disease. Anorexics greatly emphasize physical appearance, high standards, and perfection. They begin trying to achieve perfection by dieting to lose just a few pounds. However, they may become carried away and begin believing that controlling their weight is the only way to maintain control of their lives. They eat very little in order to lose as much weight as possible, insisting that they are not hungry.

Besides causing harm to the heart and organs, anorexic behavior can be deadly. Up to ten percent of anorexic patients die, usually by losing at least half of their normal body weight. Someone suffering from anorexia nervosa will need to undergo nutritional treatment, psychological therapy, and family counseling as soon as possible.

Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia nervosa is related to anorexia nervosa. It is characterized by recurring incidences of binge eating (over-eating highly fattening foods) followed by purging (forced vomiting, the use of medications to induce diarrhea, or excessive exercise to avoid weight gain). This behavior may begin when the person begins a diet, but it soon gets out of control.

Girls with this disorder usually have normal body weight but are preoccupied with body shape and weight. Though they may appear healthy and successful, many of them are actually depressed and have low self-esteem. Bulimics tend to have erosion of tooth enamel due to the acidity of vomit as well as possible tears and ruptures in their stomach and esophagus.

Treatment involves addressing issues such as depression, impulsive behavior, and guilt.

Binge Eating Disorder

This disorder is more commonly found among older and obese women and involves bingeing. However, it is usually not followed by purging of the food.

Some people may become addicted to food, which could have been triggered by eating certain foods, especially those high in fat and sugar. These people can find themselves eating an entire box of cookies without being able to stop. Studies link this behavior to a part of the brain responsible for addiction. Thus, over-eating becomes more than just an issue of willpower. An effort must be made to regain control of one's eating behaviors. Treatment for this condition involves weight loss programs as well as psychotherapy.

Obsession With Body Image

In a society in which dating is encouraged and females are sexualized, women and girls tend to feel a pressing need to appear attractive to the opposite sex.

Through magazines, movies, TV, and billboards, we are surrounded by images of models that are so thin and beautiful that one cannot help but feel ugly and fat in comparison to them. Women and girls, who face these pictures daily, begin to think that tall and frail bodies are the norm, and anything else is unattractive and unhealthy. Thus begins the obsession with wanting to lose weight.

The Reality

The truth is that not only is technology utilized to make models appear smaller than they really are, but most of these women have awkwardly tall and slim bodies to begin with. Furthermore, models spend much of their lives on extremely strict diets while exercising rigorously every day for several hours. As a result they become very unhealthy and are close to reaching the point of starvation.

For most super models, you will find that they are only acknowledged for their looks and not their intellect or their achievements. This gives females in our society the message that their value depends only on their degree of beauty, causing them to care more about their looks than their mind and character. By becoming aware of this phenomenon, women and girls can avoid falling into the dangerous trap of obsession with image.