

On alert for eating disorders

by Kristin Denault

For most students, university brings a lot of stress. Some handle it well and all they need after a tough exam is to relax at home, get a movie

or catch up on some sleep that they lost while studying.

Other students, however, have developed eating disorders which become ineffective coping mechanisms detrimental to their health

and mind. They have great potential to seriously harm a person dealing with life in this way. Eating disorders can result in death mainly due to cardiac arrest caused by low iron levels in the bloodstream necessary to

the body for proper functioning.

Effects such as these are attributed to the excessive behaviour of an anorexic or bulimic. Problems that one would experience with an eating disorder are too numerous to discuss. But an eating disorder literally affects every biological and mental part of the body in one harmful way or another.

Anne Bartlett, Residence Coordinator of Shirreff Hall, recognizes the importance of being aware of eating disorders when working with such a large number of women. However, she does not know specific numbers of women living in Shirreff Hall possibly afflicted with anorexia or bulimia. "It is so important to educate students, and people in general, because it may be your sister, your brother. It may be the girl who lives next door to you," says Bartlett.

Residence Assistants are intensively trained in peer counselling and listening skills. Strict confidentiality remains between the student seeking help and the residence assistant. Education and awareness programs on eating disorders are currently being planned.

Bartlett stressed that it is a tough time for students because of outside stresses. She encourages women having troubles with university adjustment or any problems related to an eating disorder to talk to either herself or a residence assistant.

It is important not to ignore a person exhibiting symptoms of an eating disorder. An eating disorder does not only affect the victim, but also everyone around her including her partner, friends and family. Warning signs include such cues as excessive concern about weight and an obsession with food, an inflated body image, disappearing after a meal, evidence of vomit or laxative abuse, social withdrawal, as well as depressive moods or irritability.

According to a second year Dalhousie student, who has had anorexia for the last five years, "the vic-

tim cannot seek successful treatment until she realizes that she has a problem, recovery can begin through counselling or other possibilities offered. Once I had experienced the depression and emptiness that accompany an eating disorder. Regaining my happiness became the most valuable aspect of my life."

The Department of Psychological Services is one place to find help. Located on the fourth floor of the Student Union Building, students are offered free counselling that is strictly confidential. There is a wide range of counsellors and psychologists to help with many issues that students have to deal with including eating disorders and outlining factors such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem and confidence problems.

Appointments can be made by calling the Counselling and Psychological Services at 494-2081 or visiting the office. Office hours are set to accommodate students.

The Dalhousie Women's Centre has a program to help students cope with anorexia and bulimia. For students who do not wish to seek assistance through one-on-one counselling, an eating disorder group meets on Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. Meetings are held at the Women's Centre located at 6143 South Street. Any inquiries about the support group can be made by calling the Women's Centre at 494-2432.

The Victoria General Hospital runs an Eating Disorder Clinic that helps women battle anorexia and bulimia. The clinic accepts referrals by doctors, so students should first make an appointment with their doctor to discuss the situation. The program runs in intervals and the waiting list can be long, so the wait to get an assessment can also be long. To look further into this aspect, call Dalhousie Health Services at 494-2171 to make an appointment with a doctor or the Victoria General Eating Disorder Clinic at 428-2302 for further information about the clinic.

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