

State and Local

Anorexia, bulimia can be deadly

Eating disorders harmful to health

By Suna Purser
Reporter

Hair loss, malnutrition, severe dental problems and — in extreme cases — death are some of the effects of the eating disorders anorexia nervosa and bulimia, says Steve Liter, director of social services at Greenleaf Psychiatric Hospital.

"I recently treated a woman who weighed 79 pounds and had to be fed intravenously," he says. "She had an extreme case of anorexia."

Dr. Kathleen Huston, director of Greenleaf's adult unit, said anorexics starve themselves to an extreme degree.

"In its purest form, anorexics literally starve themselves to death," Huston says. "They have a misperception about their bodies. They look in a mirror and think they're still overweight."

"There is no logic or rationale in their thinking."

Diagnostically, people must lose 25 percent of their body weight to be considered anorexics, Huston says, but cases rarely get that extreme.

Still, anorexia and bulimia exist in varying degrees in all age groups.

Anorexics and bulimics range in age from 12 to 50 and about 95 percent are women, Liter says.

But this doesn't mean men don't have eating disorders.

"A colleague of mine in Houston is treating a 13-year-old boy for anorexia," he said. "Older males who have anorexia are usually models or dancers and are more readily able to conceal the fact that they have an eating disorder."

While males may develop anorexia, it tends to be more typical in adolescent females who have a mild form of the disorder, Huston said.

Debbie Rabinowitz, a counselor at Texas A&M's Student Counseling Services, said the length of

fasting depends on the severity of the patient's eating disorder.

"Many people can go for a week without eating and just drink water the entire time," she said. "But I suspect that some can go much longer than a week."

Rabinowitz said the counseling service rarely encounters an extreme anorexic.

"Occasionally we have a person with a severe eating disorder come in, but not often," she said.

"You can tell them they're going to starve to death, literally, if they don't get medical attention. They will respond by saying 'There's nothing wrong with me. . . . Yet you know there's a problem because you can look at them and see their skeletal structure.'"

— Steve Liter, Greenleaf Psychiatric Hospital social services director

"We treated one last year we were very concerned about."

Rabinowitz agreed with Huston about an anorexic's self-image.

"They have a very distorted image of their bodies," she said. "No matter how much weight they lose, they always think they need to lose more."

Liter said anorexics have a high denial rate, a clinical term used to describe their inability or refusal to admit there is a problem.

"You can tell them they're going to starve to death, literally, if they don't get medical attention," he said. "They will respond by saying 'There's nothing wrong with me. You're crazy, I'm fine. Yet you know there's a problem because you can look at them and see their skeletal structure.'"

Anorexics rarely seek help on their own, Huston said. Many are referred by physicians or gynecologists who know the patient's health history and notice the physical changes anorexics un-

dergo. Others are urged by family or friends to get help.

Unlike anorexics, bulimics often realize they have a problem and are more likely to seek help, Liter said.

Bulimia is an eating disorder in which people binge and purge, he said.

"Bulimics will buy a box of doughnuts, a pie and a loaf of bread, and eat it all at one time," he said. "They eat things that go

maintained by electrolytes. Bulimia disrupts that balance by destroying electrolytes."

Besides creating dental problems and chemical imbalances, in extreme cases, bulimia may result in cardiac arrest.

Bulimia cases outnumber anorexia cases by a 10-to-1 margin, Liter said.

Rabinowitz agreed, saying the counseling service sees more bulimics than anorexics.

"We are running two groups of eight each right now," Rabinowitz said. "Primarily, they are bulimics. Bulimics are more aware that they have a problem and are more willing to do something about it. They are usually self-referred."

"Anorexics have a higher denial rate and don't really feel that they have a problem," she said.

Liter said people develop eating disorders for many reasons.

"There is great pressure in our culture to be accepted, to look like a model and to be attractive to males," he said. "The feeling of control is also important."

"Many people with eating disorders feel as if they have no control in their lives. For example, there is a feeling of 'I can't control the grades I make, but I can control what goes into my body and how I look,'" he said.

Sometimes there is family pressure, Huston said. Parents pressure their children to achieve and the children may use an eating disorder as a form of rebellion.

Anorexia, in particular, may be the result of a power struggle between parent and child, she said. Refusal to eat becomes the child's control over parental authority.

Greenleaf Psychiatric Hospital and the Student Counseling Services offer programs to help anorexics and bulimics overcome their problems.

The programs stress the importance of gaining constructive control in life and handling social relationships effectively.

Student Senate votes to create committee

By Christi Daugherty
Staff Writer

Calling the Student Government's actual power extremely limited, the Student Senate voted Wednesday to create a committee to study the possibility of placing a student on the Texas A&M Board of Regents.

The bill calls for an ad-hoc committee, with members appointed by the speaker of the Senate, to study the situation for two years. It gives the committee the power to work in cooperation with the Legislative Study Group to lobby in Austin and within the A&M administration on behalf of the Senate.

If a student seat were to be created, the bill would make it a voting seat elected by the student body.

Jerry Rosiek, author of the bill, said, "I think it's very important we make this an elected position, because if they were appointed they'd become brown-nosers really fast."

Though such a seat is not uncommon in other states, Rosiek said that in Texas there are currently no students or faculty members on any university's board of regents.

"There are 85 schools in the United States with students on their boards of regents," Rosiek said. "There are 60 with voting students on their boards, 35 which elect students to the boards and 19 which elect voting students to their boards."

"Basically, it's obvious that the numbers go down the more power the seat has."

The bill also suggests that the committee study the idea of creating a faculty seat on the board.

The Senate also passed a bill creating an ad-hoc committee to study aesthetic improvements at Texas A&M.

The bill called the quality of the aesthetic environment at the A&M campus "less than it could be" and suggested that improvements be made in such areas as the quality of the architecture and landscaping, the number of art exhibits, classical

music performances and stage productions brought to the campus.

Rosiek, the bill's author, introduced as a guest speaker Dr. John McDermott, department head of humanities in medicine and distinguished philosophy professor at A&M, to discuss the issue before the Senate.

McDermott defined for the Senate the difference between aesthetic and anaesthetic by using examples of on-campus architecture.

"Standing next to Zachry is an anaesthetic experience," McDermott said. "It is a building of absolutely no architectural beauty. It could have been designed by me."

As an aesthetic experience he suggested Senate members look at Scoates Hall, "with its lovely metal work done by hand," or the Animal Industries building, or the old Chemistry Building.

"The aesthetic is different from the anaesthetic — not because I like it and you don't — but because of the sophistication of it," McDermott said.

Standing in the foyer of the System Administration Building and looking out over what he called "unquestionably the most impressive entrance to any campus I've ever seen," is an aesthetic experience, McDermott said.

"We have the chance to build something here that is absolutely spectacular," he said. "But 10 more years of that crap (Zachry and the Halbouty Geosciences Building) and it's too late."

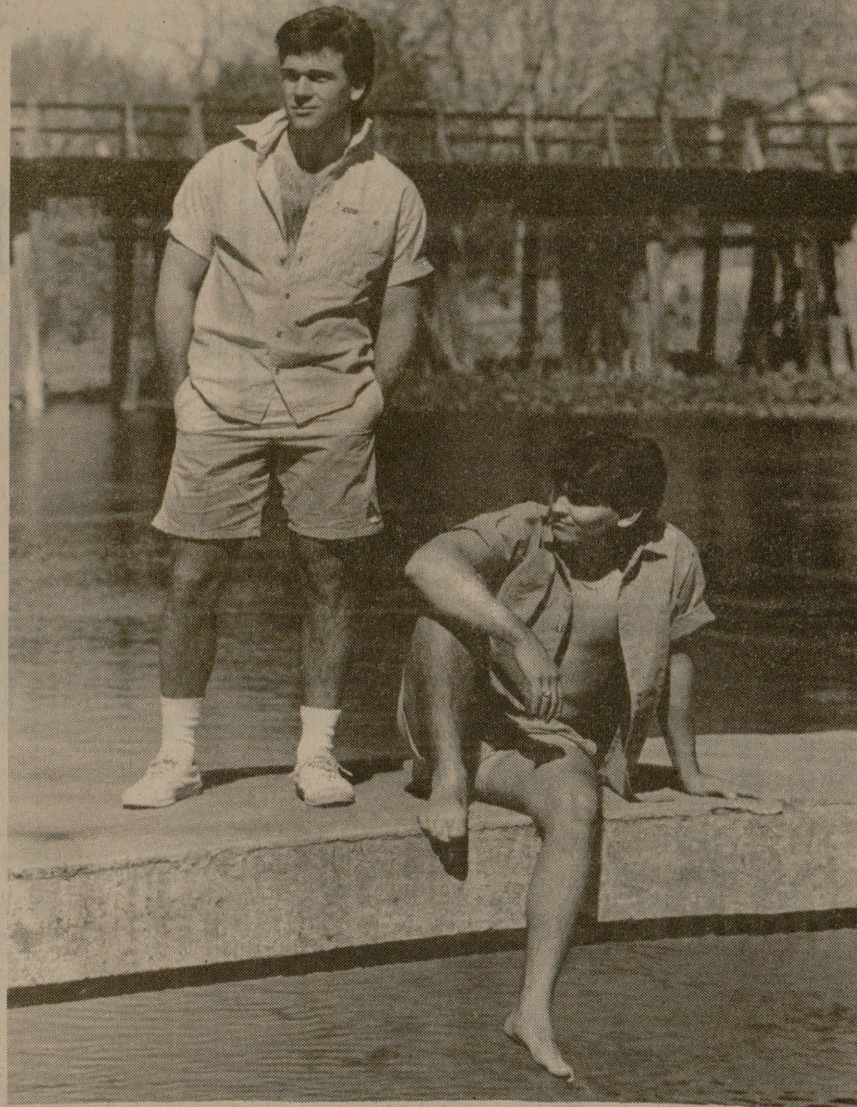
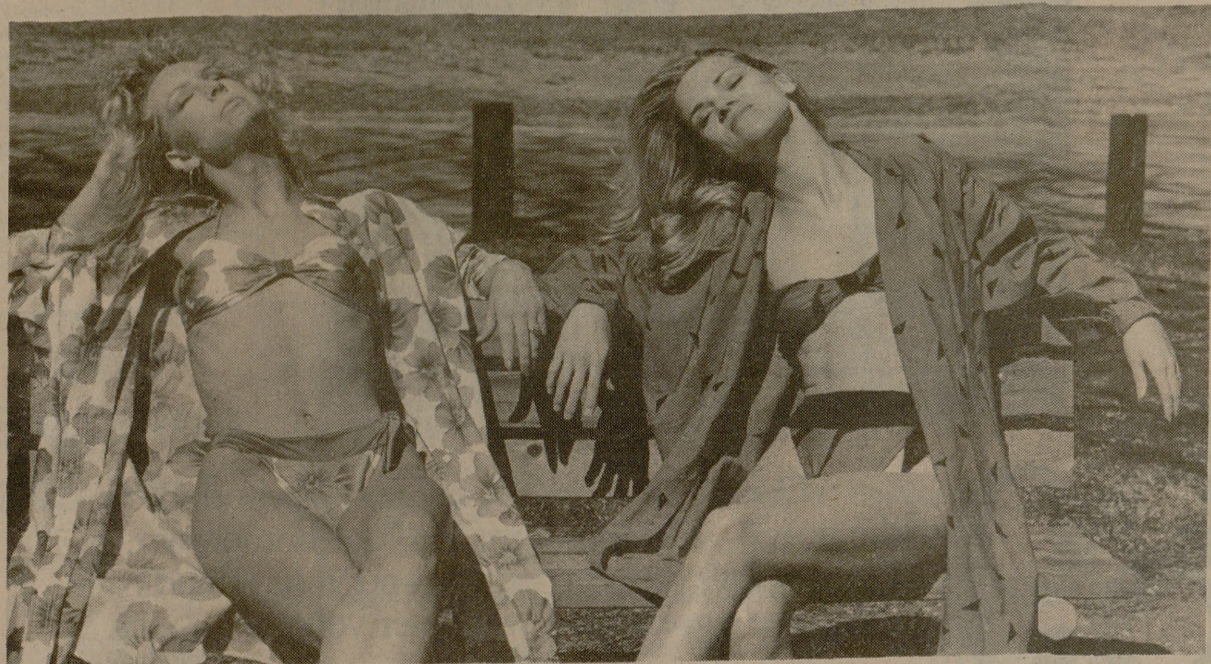
"If you do it (the committee) right, in 10 years they won't build a mousetrap on campus without asking you first."

In other action, the Senate passed a strict absence bill which removes from their positions any senators who miss more two or more meetings in a semester.

The Senate has discussed its absence problem at almost every meeting this semester, but this is the first bill passed combating the problem.

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