

Physical Complications of Self-Induced Vomiting

Self-induced vomiting is commonly reported in individuals with eating disorders as a form of compensation, that is, an attempt by the person to prevent weight gain by 'undoing' the effects of eating. Frequent, self-induced vomiting to compensate for a binge often leads to a dangerous cycle of eating or binge eating followed by vomiting. Vomiting is an ineffective means of weight control, as studies indicate that approximately half of what is eaten is still absorbed by the body. Regular vomiting also has adverse effects on overall health and wellbeing.

Physical Complications

Self-induced vomiting is associated with medical conditions impacting the teeth, oesophagus, gastrointestinal system, kidneys, skin appearance, cardiovascular system, musculoskeletal system and eyes.

Dental Complications

Frequent self-induced vomiting can result in changes to the appearance and texture of teeth. They can become yellow or brown and in extreme cases, fall out. This is due to gastric acid (from the stomach) entering the mouth and damaging tooth enamel. Enamel usually protects teeth from breakages, decay and sensitivity. Constant enamel damage can result in dental erosion, brittle teeth or extremely sensitive teeth. In extreme cases, the enamel can be completely eroded, and damage to the inner layer of teeth can occur. This requires immediate dental treatment.

Frequent vomiting can also result in sores inside the mouth and gums that bleed. Ulcers can form along the pallet as a result of the acid in the mouth when vomiting.

Swollen Glands

After vomiting is finished, salivary glands often become very swollen. This can result in the face and jaw looking enlarged or puffy and can be a source of significant distress.

Damage to the Oesophagus

It is very common for the oesophagus to become irritated or damaged and ruptured as a result of forceful removal of acid and food from the body. This can be accompanied by reflux, heartburn and regurgitation of acid, all of which cause severe discomfort. The actual muscular part of the oesophagus can become compromised, resulting in the inability of the muscles to relax and oesophageal spasms.

Eyes and Nose

Nose bleeds and haemorrhage (red patches) in the eye can be caused by self-induced vomiting.

Calloused Hands

A typical consequence of frequent self-induced vomiting are scratches and callouses on the fingers and knuckles. These scratches can also be burned by the gastric acid that enters the mouth when vomiting and cause distress and pain.

Electrolyte Imbalance

The loss of fluid and food from the body can result in a loss of electrolytes, in particular, potassium, sodium and chloride. These electrolytes are essential for proper bodily functioning, as they maintain the proper electrical and nerve impulses in muscles. If these impulses are not regulated in the heart, it can result in cardiac arrest and potentially death. Significantly low levels of electrolytes can also cause weak muscles, seizures and paralysis in different parts of the body. Poor electrolyte levels can also cause kidney problems and impact digestion.

Gastrointestinal Complications

Frequent and repeated vomiting over long periods of time can cause complications in the digestive system, specifically the gastrointestinal tract. As a result of a dysregulated digestive system, any food entering the stomach can cause discomfort and pain. People also are no longer able to identify and differentiate between feelings of hunger and fullness. Often, rectal walls move out of place at an extremely young age in individuals who vomit frequently, which can cause rectal bleeding.

Appearance

Frequent, self-induced vomiting can cause visible damage to the eyes, in the form of subconjunctival haemorrhages or small bleeds in the eyes. Skin spots as a result of broken capillaries and reddening surrounding the mouth are common among individuals who frequently self-induce their vomiting. People can often find purple spots on their skin as a result of repeated vomiting.

References:

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