



Anorexia Nervosa

When the Need for Control Leads to Substance Use

What is Anorexia Nervosa?

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder defined by severe food restriction, an intense fear of weight gain, and a deeply distorted perception of one's own body. It creates relentless internal pressure to control food and body weight, consuming daily life and eroding relationships from the inside out.

What Does It Look Like?

- **Extreme Food Restriction**
They refuse meals or severely limit intake, even when visibly underweight.
- **Distorted Body Perception**
They see themselves as overweight despite clear evidence otherwise.
- **Rigid Rituals Around Food and Exercise**
Fixed routines govern every meal and movement.
- **Denial and Resistance to Help**
They minimize the danger and push back against any intervention.

How Does Anorexia Nervosa Contribute to Relapse?

When anorexia and addiction occur together, the same drive for control and relief from anxiety that sustains restriction also sustains substance use.

- 1) **Substance Use and Restriction Serve Each Other**
Stimulants suppress appetite. Alcohol quiets the anxiety that drives restriction.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Can't Address Both**
Treating addiction without addressing anorexia leaves the core compulsion untouched.
- 3) **Without Treating Both, Relapse is More Likely**
Untreated anorexia keeps the psychological drivers of substance use alive.

Prevalence:

~0.6% lifetime prevalence in U.S. adults¹

Co-Occurrence:

16% develop a substance use disorder in their lifetime²

Relapse Risk:

Significant Increased risk of relapse when untreated³

Sources: ¹ Hudson et al., *Biological Psychiatry* (2007); *National Comorbidity Survey Replication*.
² Devoe et al., *Journal of Eating Disorders* (2021).
³ Gregorowski et al., *BMC Psychiatry* (2013).

Long-Term Treatment for Anorexia Nervosa and Addiction

Anorexia nervosa and addiction share deep roots in anxiety, compulsion, and distorted reward processing. A 30-day program rarely has time to address either condition fully, let alone both at the same time.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the extended structure both conditions require. Clients advance when they demonstrate real changes in how they manage anxiety, identity, and the compulsive behaviors that sustained both disorders.



“Families can’t decide which crisis to respond to first, the eating disorder or the substance use. They need a program equipped to address both at the same time.”

 **Angie Buja, MA, LPC-S**
Family Program Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Anorexia Nervosa

When anorexia and addiction are treated separately or in short-term programs, the anxiety and compulsion driving both disorders remain active. Each condition reinforces the other.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Untreated anorexia sustains anxiety driving substance use.
- **Rebuilding Response to Stress**
New coping patterns must replace old compulsions.
- **Providing Enough Time**
Two interlocking compulsions cannot resolve in weeks.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation’s only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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