Basic Physical Exam for Patients with Eating Disorders

People with eating disorders typically recover but the process takes time. In the meantime, they need medical monitoring as frequently as their behaviors require to be certain they are stable enough for outpatient treatment. People who are actively purging need electrolytes monitored regularly. People who are restricting calories need their weight and vital signs monitored.

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Dr Koeller is a pediatrician who is an eating disorders expert. She is now in private practice and formerly worked at the Kartini Clinic. Her recommendations are based on eating disorder medical studies and the protocol from the Kartini Clinic.

Physical Exam for people with disordered eating or eating disorders:

Examine patient in a gown or the same shorts and t-shirt each visit.

1. Urine specific gravity--have client void bladder and give urine sample. Do not allow the patient to take any purses/backpacks, etc. into bathroom. Check USG for dehydration or water-loading (when a patient drinks water to increase body weight.)

2. Weight: Have patient step on scale backwards so that they can't see the number. Give general feedback versus the specific number. Height measurement is only necessary on the first visit.

3. Vital signs:
   a. Have patient lie quietly for ~5 minutes, then check HR and BP while lying down.
   b. Have patient stand for ~ 2-3 minutes, then check HR and BP standing.

   NO sitting in between!

The patient is orthostatic when:
BP—when systolic BP drops by more than 10 on standing
HR—when HR increases by more than 20 on standing

4. Blood work: If patient is purging with vomiting, diuretics or laxatives, check electrolytes frequently. Elevated serum amylase might indicate self-induced vomiting.