Crash diets do more harm than good

By Cynthia Bulinski Emerald Contributor

When considering whether to diet, many people know their weight but seldom know their body composition. The numbers on the scale do not reveal body composition — fat mass plus lean body mass.

A crash diet — a daily intake of 1,000 calories or less — often changes the body's composition, and the dieter ends up with a higher lat mass, a speaker said at a recent University workshop.

Britt Ellis, a University doctoral student in community health, said a crash diet signals a starvation situation to the body.

The body then conserves energy by decreasing the number of calories needed per day, Ellis said at a University Lifestyle Planning Program work-

This decrease of required calories translates to a lower basal metabolic rate. Ellis said, when normal eating is resumed, the body needs fewer calories than it did before and weight gains are common. If another crash diet is tried, the basal metabolic rate is again affected, she said.

Moreover, because crash dieters often lose fat,

water and muscle, dieters usually are fatter than when they started the diet because the percentage of body fat is higher, Ellis said.

"We are dieting into states of obesity," she said. One-third of women ages 19-39 diet at least once a month, Ellis said. She said this loss-thengain pattern can lead to a form a high blood pressure for some individuals.

Robert Hackman, an associate professor in the School and Community Health Department, said, "Ninety-five percent of all people who diet gain back all the weight they lost "over a two-year period."

Studies of 1,000-calories-or-less diets showed an average basal metabolic rate decrease of 13-23 percent, Ellis said.

A restricted diet eventually leads to feelings of deprivation, followed by binging or eating more than the body needs. Guilt sets in and often the weight is regained.

Guilt coupled with feeling undisciplined or abnormal are common among dieters. Resolutely, another diet is tried.

Ellis said the first step in breaking the detri-

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EATING

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fluctuation, depression, changes in appearance, abnormal interest in food, severe dieting and exercise, and substance abuse.

CAUSES

Merten said psychologists and doctors are baffled by eating disorders and can only offer theories for the causes.

"We don't know," Merten said "It's not a rational act, so it's kind of hard to find a rational reason."

However, eating disorders may be culturally driven. Women experience low self-esteem when they fail to meet the thin standards of society. Merten said. Low self-esteem leads women to believe they would be happier "if only (they) could lose a few more pounds," she said.

"There's an obsessive desire to be thin in post-industrial society," Merten said. "Young women have an impossible task. They're unable to keep their bodies from getting rounder and fuller."

Eating disorders are addictive behaviors, Murphy said. People may turn to food to escape the pain of a traumatic event in the past such as incest or rape.

DANGERS

Eating disorders are a serious threat to a person's health. Anorexics may literally starve themselves to death, Merten said.

"Some girls who are 5-6 and

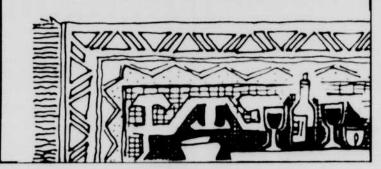
80 pounds look into a mirror and think they're fat," she said. "How far can they go? They can die."

People who want help for an eating disorder should call the University Counseling Center at 346-3227 or Sacred Heart General Hospital's eating disorders clinic at 686-7372.



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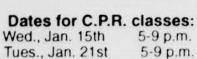
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