

why?
WEIGHT?

BODY sense

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Eating Disorders are Not Really About Food

While eating disorders can start with an obsession with food and weight issues, they are often about much more than food. Eating disorders are very serious and complex health conditions. They can destroy one's physical and emotional health, self-esteem, and sense of competence and control. Eating disorders that aren't treated can lead to serious illnesses and even death.

People with eating disorders often use food and the control of food to make up for feeling that they are not good enough or lack control in their lives. When a person's attitudes about food, weight, and body size lead to rigid eating and exercise habits that jeopardize one's health, safety, and well-being, it's likely that they have an eating disorder.

Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image is generally thought of as the mental picture you have of your body, how you think you look, and how much importance you place on that in defining yourself and your self-worth.

Eating disorders are linked to psychological factors such as depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy or lack of control in life. Problem relationships, physical or sexual abuse, being teased about size or weight, or having trouble talking about emotions and feelings can also be linked to eating disorders.

Too much focus on 'being thin' and the 'perfect body' to define beauty rather than on accepting people for who they are and what they stand for, can also play a key role in eating disorders.



The Most Common Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa (AN) is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder, which involves self-starvation and excessive weight loss. Someone is said to have AN when they don't maintain their body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height (e.g., at least 85% of what is expected to be normal). Other symptoms include dieting to extremes, excessive exercise, loss of menstrual periods, and a distorted body image. Over time, this can result in kidney and liver damage, loss of bone density, heart problems, and even death.

Bulimia Nervosa (BN) is another serious eating disorder. BN involves a cycle of binge eating (the intake of large amounts of food) and purging (elimination of the food through forced vomiting, excessive use of laxatives, period of fasting, or excessive exercise). People with BN are extremely concerned with body weight and shape. The act of bingeing then purging can result in serious damage to the body, such as:

- Tooth decay
- Severe dehydration
- Upset stomach
- Constipation
- Sore throat
- Interruption or stopping of menstrual periods

It can also damage vital organs such as the liver and kidneys, cause heart problems, and even death.

Alarming Statistics

American Dietetic Association

A study in the American Dietetic Association Journal (ADA) (2006) reported that dieting and other unhealthy weight control methods may be associated with weight gain, being overweight, and eating disorders in teens, especially females.

The ADA estimates that between 0.5% and 1% of all females between 12 and 18 years of age have anorexia nervosa, while 1%-5% have bulimia nervosa.

Even more alarming is the ADA's estimate that up to 30% of adolescent girls engage in some kind of unhealthy dieting behaviour.

Canadian Family Physician

A study of adolescent girls in Grades 10 to 12 in rural Nova Scotia reported that 50% of the 1133 participants saw themselves as not being the "right" weight; 60% were trying to lose weight, and during the past 30 days, 16% of the girls were attempting to control or lose weight and had engaged in disordered eating behaviour. Only 22% of the girls had spoken with a doctor about a healthy weight in the year before the study. (Cook, et al, 2007).

Canadian Medical Association

While the most common age of onset is between 14 and 25 years of age, unhealthy dieting behaviours are reported in girls as young as 10 years of age. (Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2004).

Key References:

Cook, S.J., MacPherson, K., and Langille, D. B. (2007). Far from ideal: Weight perception, weight control, and associated risky behaviour of adolescent girls in Nova Scotia. *Canadian Family Physician*, 53,678-684.

Debate, R., Lewis, M., Zhang, Y., Blunt, H., and Thompson, S.H. (2008). Similar but different: Sociocultural Attitudes towards Appearance, Body Shape Dissatisfaction, and Weight Control Behaviors among Male and Female College Students. *American Journal of Health Education*, 39, 5.

Jones, J.M., Bennett, S., Olmsted, M.P., Lawson, M.L., and Rodin, G. (2001). Disordered eating attitudes and behaviours in teenaged girls: a school-based study. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 165(5), 547-52.

Tom, G., Chen, A., Liao, H., and Shao, J. (2005). Body Image, Relationships, and Time. *The Journal of Psychology*, 139(5), 458-468.

Are You or Someone You Know at Risk for an Eating Disorder?

Healthy body image and eating concerns:

- Interest in improving physical appearance, health, and overall wellness.
- Enthusiasm about a new fitness or healthy eating plan.
- Focus on body image, while having a reasonable level of self-acceptance.
- Enjoy a physical training program that includes proper nutrition and balance.

Some example of unhealthy body image and eating concerns are:

- Only focusing on weight loss or extreme dieting.
- Punitive approach to body image which includes self-degrading comments and/or excessive exercise or purging after eating.
- Working out to lose weight without regard for health.
- How one feels about themselves is based entirely on what they think they look like.
- Extreme and inflexible approach to a diet/exercise routine.

It's important to remember that every body is different due, in part, to our genetics which influences our bone structure, body size, shape, and weight differently. According to the National Eating Disorders Association, your ideal weight is the weight that allows you to feel strong and energetic and lets you lead a healthy, normal life. This means that you are not too tired, too easily frustrated, too anxious or angry, and you have the energy to socialize with friends, be physically active on a regular basis, and place the proper emphasis on school or work.

Consider these simple keys to a healthy body and a healthy body image:

- Treat your body with respect
- Give it enough rest
- Fuel it with a variety of foods
- Exercise moderately
- Resist the pressure to judge yourself and others based on weight, shape, or size
- Respect people based on the qualities of their character and the things that they have done, rather than just because of their appearance

WEBSITES

Dietitians of Canada
www.dietitians.ca

The Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association
www.bana.ca

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute
www.cflri.ca

National Eating Disorder Information Centre (Canada)
www.nedic.ca

National Eating Disorders Association
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

// The media's power over our development of self-esteem and body image can be incredibly strong. //

(National Eating Disorders Association 2006)



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