

Eating Disorders in Men

We all know that the societal pressures girls and women feel to achieve unrealistic body ideals have been subject to public concern for quite some time. But girls and women aren't the only ones experiencing negative body image.

According to the [National Eating Disorders Association \(NEDA\)](#), approximately 1 in 3 people experiencing an eating disorder is male. The prevalence of eating disorders in men is on the rise. In fact, a study in the [American Journal of Men's Health](#) states that an estimates 10 million boys and men in the United States will experience an eating disorder in their lifetime.

What do eating disorders in men look like?

While eating disorders in women are commonly associated with a desire for thinness and weight loss, the same is not as often true for men. The common symptoms of eating disorders are extreme or unhealthy weight loss behaviors, like fasting or purging, but that typically applies to females. Because the "ideal" masculine body typically looks like less body fat and more muscle, men with eating disorders typically focus on trying to ["get muscular and bulk up"](#).

Research has found that masculine body ideals are influencing men's behavior toward diet and exercise in distinctly different ways. [Nearly a third of teen boys](#) in the United States report they want to gain weight, and [nearly a quarter of young men](#) also report taking supplements, steroids, or eating more to bulk up.

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- NATIONAL EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

What are the causes of eating disorders?

The "why" of an eating disorder is tough to narrow down. There are numerous factors that can affect eating disorders, and eating disorders often develop in response to trauma or some other form of mental illness. Like depression or anxiety, eating disorders can also come down to matters of brain chemistry. Family dynamics, specifically when they are stressful or abusive, can also play a role. All of these triggers can affect men just as they affect women.

What are the warning signs & treatment options?

You can't always tell just by looking at someone if they're struggling with an eating disorder. While there may be some visible signs, ["eating disorders are unique in that they have both mental health and physical health consequences"](#).

There's also the issue of body image. Women are consistently assailed by cultural messaging telling them what an ideal "feminine" body looks like; men deal with the same thing, even if the specific messaging is slightly different. Men face fixed cultural standards of what constitutes a "masculine" body. Those standards are even stricter among athletes and male models, and even tougher to deal with within the LGBTQ+ community.

Eating disorders can potentially affect every organ system in the body. An obsessive focus on exercise and diet can lead to serious and possibly even life threatening impacts on physical health that may require urgent treatment. It is possible to be physically healthy while experiencing extreme mental distress over diet, exercise, and body dissatisfaction, but that's not always the case.

Causes aside, men can struggle with a range of eating disorders – including bulimia, anorexia, binge eating disorder, and more. To help determine if you or a friend has an eating disorder, these warning signs could be helpful:

- Your weight is in a constant state of flux.
- You are chronically dieting, even if you are also perpetually underweight.
- You exercise to an extreme, feeling guilt and anxiety if you miss a single fitness session.
- You engage in secretive or ritualistic eating behaviors – hiding food, eating alone, etc.
- You spend far too much time thinking about and obsessing over your caloric intake or the fat content in your foods.
- You grow up socially isolated and withdrawn, avoiding groups of people – especially gatherings where food is being served.
- You continually alternate between fasting and overeating.

While all of these warning signs can point to some harsh realities, there is some hopeful news – no male is ever beyond the scope of eating disorder recovery. With the right intervention, men can achieve lifelong recovery and healing. The first step is to seek out a diagnosis.