

What Can Eating and Body Image Concerns Look Like in Men?

- In a 2003 survey conducted at UMCP 1 in 2 men indicated that they sometimes or frequently engage in dieting, eating special foods, or taking nutritional supplements specifically to improve their appearance.
 - 2 in 5 men indicated feeling upset or depressed by their appearance
 - 2 in 5 men indicated that they spend 60-120 minutes each day on physical activities to improve their body appearance and 1 in 10 men said they spent more 120 minutes on these activities
 - 1 in 6 men indicated that sometimes their appearance related concerns or activities undermined their social relationships
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- College men, on average, want a body that is 30 lb. more muscular than their own.
 - 43% of men are dissatisfied with their overall appearance, and 53% are dissatisfied with their weight. (Psychology Today survey in 1997)
 - If GI Joe Extreme were life size, he would have a 55” chest and 27” bicep (his bicep would be as big as his waist and bigger than most competition body builders)

Anorexia Nervosa in Males

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Anorexia Nervosa is a severe, life-threatening disorder in which the individual refuses to maintain a minimally normal body weight, is intensely afraid of gaining weight, and exhibits a significant distortion in the perception of the shape or size of his body, as well as dissatisfaction with his body shape and size.

Behavioral Characteristics:

- Excessive dieting, fasting, restricted diet
- Food rituals
- Preoccupation with body building, weight lifting, or muscle toning
- Compulsive exercise
- Difficulty eating with others, lying about eating
- Frequently weighing self
- Preoccupation with food
- Focus on certain body parts; e.g., buttocks, thighs, stomach
- Disgust with body size or shape
- Distortion of body size; i.e., feels fat even though others tell him he is already very thin

Emotional and Mental Characteristics:

- Intense fear of becoming fat or gaining weight
- Depression
- Social isolation
- Strong need to be in control
- Rigid, inflexible thinking, “all or nothing”
- Decreased interest in sex or fears around sex
- Possible conflict over gender identity or sexual orientation
- Low sense of self worth -- uses weight as a measure of worth
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Perfectionistic -- strives to be the neatest, thinnest, smartest, etc.
- Difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating
- Irritability, denial -- believes others are overreacting to his low weight or caloric restriction
- Insomnia

Physical Characteristics:

- Low body weight (15% or more below what is expected for age, height, activity level)
- Lack of energy, fatigue
- Muscular weakness
- Decreased balance, unsteady gait
- Lowered body temperature, blood pressure, pulse rate
- Tingling in hands and feet
- Thinning hair or hair loss
- Lanugo (downy growth of body hair)
- Heart arrhythmia
- Lowered testosterone levels

Binge Eating Disorder in Males

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Binge eating disorder is a severe, life-threatening disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of compulsive overeating or binge eating. In binge eating disorder, the purging in an attempt to prevent weight gain that is characteristic of bulimia nervosa is absent.

Behavioral Characteristics:

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating
- Eating much more rapidly than normal
- A sense of lack of control over eating during binge episodes
- Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
- Hoarding food
- Hiding food and eating in secret; e.g., eating alone or in the car, hiding wrappers

- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating throughout the day with no planned mealtimes

Emotional and Mental Characteristics:

- Feelings of disgust, guilt, or depression during and after overeating
- Binge eating often triggered by uncomfortable feelings such as anger, anxiety, or shame
- Binge eating used as a means of relieving tension, or to “numb” feelings
- Rigid, inflexible “all or nothing” thinking
- Strong need to be in control
- Difficulty expressing feelings and needs
- Perfectionistic
- Works hard to please others
- Avoids conflict, tries to “keep the peace”
- Disgust about body size, often teased about their body while growing up
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Social isolation
- Depression
- Moodiness and irritability

Physical Characteristics:

- Heart and blood pressure problems
- Joint problems
- Abnormal blood-sugar levels
- Fatigue
- Difficulty walking or engaging in physical activities

For more information on research on males and body image please see www.nationaleatingdisordersawareness.org