

Men and eating disorders

How common are eating disorders among men?

It has been commonly stated that one in ten people with eating disorders are men. Recent figures from the NHS Information Centre suggested the real figure is actually much higher, with 700,000 men being registered as having an eating disorder, a quarter of the total number of people affected.

While it is difficult to be exact in terms of numbers, it is clear that there are many men who hide their eating disorder and do not seek help. Many men feel eating disorders are a 'female' condition and this shame is combined with the guilt and secrecy common to all eating disorders.

Eating disorders in men typically develop between the age of 14 and 25 but people can also be affected at other ages.

How do eating disorders develop in men?

Eating disorders in men have many of the same causes as eating disorders in women. There will certainly be a number of different causes and these may include childhood trauma, family difficulties, stressful life events, low self esteem, personality factors and genetic predisposition.

Eating disorders in men can be expressed in a different way to eating disorders in women – men and boys may be more preoccupied with having a muscular physique than losing weight.

Male eating disorders are often closely linked with exercise and initially appear to be healthy, masking the underlying problem. For example, sudden weight loss may seem the result of a training programme for a sporting goal. There is also evidence that men are facing similar pressures to women in terms of conforming to an unrealistic body shape and increasing numbers of men and boys feel dissatisfied with their own bodies.

Risk factors

Some of the same risk factors known to apply to women seem to also apply to men and there are others which are more specific to men. In common with women, the most important factor is unresolved distress and trauma, which is expressed in an eating disorder. But some groups seem to be at a greater risk:

- Men who have been overweight, bullied or teased about their weight
- Taking part in a sport which demands a specific body shape, for example athletes and jockeys are at a higher risk
- A study carried out by the national charity Beat found 20 per cent of men with eating disorders are gay, making up twice the proportion of gay men in the population as a whole.
- Men working in a job or profession in which an idealised body image is very dominant. Male models, actors, and general entertainers seem to be at higher risk than the general population.

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Male eating disorders and Newbridge House

We welcome men at Newbridge House, where we provide comprehensive treatment programmes to meet individual needs. If patients require an individual programme of outpatient therapy, we can structure treatment around individual needs and commitments, offering evening appointments, for example.

Newbridge House is a private, detached facility in a suburban setting in Sutton Coldfield, not connected to other mental health services.

Young men aged 14 to 17 may be assessed for our inpatient programme for adolescents, tailored to the needs of young people with eating disorders. However, we are not able to admit men over the age of 17 for inpatient services.