

# EATING DISORDERS FACT SHEET

---

## WHO IS AFFECTED BY EATING DISORDERS?

Eating disorders affect people of all ages, genders, socioeconomic classes, racial backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities.

### Statistics

- Eating disorders are the third most common chronic illness among adolescent girls (Herpetz-Dahlmann, 2015)
- While these illnesses disproportionately affect girls and women, approximately 20% of people living with an eating disorder are boys and men (Sweeting et al., 2015)
- Research has shown that approximately 7.5% of pregnant women meet the diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder (Bulik et al., 2007; Easter et al., 2013)
- The number of mid-life and older women presenting for eating disorder treatment has increased in the past 20 years (Ackard et al., 2013)
- In a large study involving adults seeking eating disorder treatment, 17% of the participants were 40 years of age or older (Elran-Barak et al., 2015)
- Studies have shown that between 14% and 42% of men with eating disorders are gay or bisexual and that, contrary to a common perception, lesbians and bisexual women are as likely as heterosexual women to be affected by eating disorders (Feldman & Meyer, 2007; Matthews-Ewald et al., 2014)
- Within a large sample of university attendees, the rate of receiving an eating disorder diagnosis within the previous year was significantly higher among transgender students compared to cisgender students (Diemer et al., 2015)
- Population-based surveys indicate that rates of eating disorders are similar across levels of socioeconomic status (Mitchison et al., 2014; Mulders-Jones et al., 2017)
- Research suggests that the lifetime prevalence rates of eating disorders among Latino, Black, Asian, and non-Latino White populations in North America are comparable (Marques et al., 2011)
- Eating disorders can develop in people who have not been exposed to media images of thin bodies – cases of anorexia nervosa in people with congenital blindness have been documented (Thomas et al., 2012)

## HOW MANY PEOPLE IN CANADA ARE AFFECTED BY EATING DISORDERS?

Eating disorders are a significant public health issue in Canada.

- Findings from the most recent Canadian Community Health Survey – Mental Health indicate that in 2012, over 113 000 individuals ages 15 and older were living with an eating disorder diagnosed by a health professional (Statistics Canada, 2013)
- Research indicates that the prevalence rate of eating disorders is between 2% and 3% of the population – and many of those affected do not seek or receive care specific to their illness (The Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2014)

- At any given time, an estimated 734,000 to 1,100,000 people in Canada have symptoms sufficient for an eating disorder diagnosis (Statistics Canada, 2017)

## HOW CAN YOU IDENTIFY SOMEONE WITH AN EATING DISORDER?

You can't tell whether or not someone has an eating disorder just by looking at them. People of all body types experience eating disorders. Similarly, you can't rely on an affected person's size or weight to identify which type of eating disorder they have.

### Statistics

- A study of adolescents presenting at a specialized eating disorder clinic found that 17% of those with atypical anorexia nervosa were "overweight" or "obese" according to their body mass index (Sawyer et al., 2016)
- A large study involving population-based surveys conducted in multiple countries found that 25% of individuals who had lived with binge eating disorder in the past 12 months had a body mass index within the "normal" weight range (Kessler et al., 2013)

### References

- Ackard, D. M., Richter, S., Frisch, M. J., Mangham, D., & Cronemeyer, C. L. Eating disorder treatment among women forty and older: Increases in prevalence over time and comparisons to young adult patients. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 74(2), 175-178.
- Bulik, C. M., Von Holle, A., Hamer, R., Knopf Berg, C., Torgerson, L., Magnus, P.,...Reichborn-Kjennerud, T. (2007). Patterns of remission, continuation and incidence of broadly defined eating disorders during early pregnancy in the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study (MoBa). *Psychological Medicine*, 37, 1109-1118. doi: 10.1017/S0033291707000724
- Diemer, E. W., Grant, J. D., Munn-Chernoff, M. A., Patterson, D. A., & Duncan, A. E. (2015). Gender identity, sexual orientation, and eating-related pathology in a national sample of college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 57(2), 144-149. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.03.003
- Easter, A., Bye, A., Taborelli, E., Corfield, F., Schmidt, U., Treasure, J., & Micali, N. (2013). Recognising the symptoms: How common are eating disorders in pregnancy? *European Eating Disorders Review*, 21(4), 340-344. doi: 10.1002/erv.2229
- Elran-Barak, R., Fitzsimmons-Craft, E. E., Benyamini, Y., Crow, S. J., Peterson, C. B., Hill, L. L.,...Le Grange, D. (2015). Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder in midlife and beyond. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 203(8), 583-590.
- Feldman, M. B. & Meyer, I. H. (2007). Eating disorders in diverse lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 40(3), 218-226. doi: 10.1002/eat.20360
- Herpetz-Dahlman, Beate. (2015). Adolescent eating disorders: Update on definitions, symptomology, epidemiology, and comorbidity. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 24, 177-196.
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P. A., Chiu, W. T., Dietz, A. C., Hudson, J. I., Shahly, V.,...Xavier, M. (2013). The prevalence of correlates of binge eating disorder in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys. *Biological Psychiatry*, 73(9), 904-914. doi: 10.1016/j.biopsych.2012.11.020.
- Marques, L., Alegria, M., Becker, A. E., Chen, C., Fang, A., Chosak, A., & Belo Diniz, J. (2011). Comparative prevalence, correlates of impairment, and service utilization for eating disorders across U.S. ethnic groups: Implications for reducing ethnic disparities in health care access for eating disorders. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 44(5), 412-420. doi: 10.1002/eat.20787
- Matthews-Ewald, M. R., Zullig, K. J., & Ward, R. M. (2004). Sexual orientation and disordered eating behaviors among self-identified male and female college students. *Eating Behaviors*, 15(3), 441-444.
- Mitchison, D., Hay, P., Slewa-Younan, S., & Mond, J., (2014). The changing demographic profile of eating disorder behaviors in the community. *BMC Public Health*, 14, 943. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-943
- Mulders-Jones, B., Mitchison, D., Girosi, F., & Hay, P. (2017). Socioeconomic correlates of eating disorder symptoms in an Australian population-based sample. *PLOS One*, 12(1): e0170603. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0170603
- Statistics Canada. (2013). *Canadian Community Health Survey – Mental Health*. Retrieved from <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca:81/imdb/p2SV.pl?function=getSurvey&SDDS=5015&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2>
- Statistics Canada. (2017). *Population Estimates*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-581-x/2018000/pop-eng.htm>
- Sweeting, H., Walker, L., MacLean, A., Patterson, C., Raisanen, U., & Hunt, K. (2015). Prevalence of eating disorders in males: A review of rates reported in academic research and UK mass media. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 14(2). doi: 10.3149/jmh.1402.86
- The Standing Committee on the Status of Women. (2014). *Eating disorders among girls and women in Canada: Report of the standing committee on the status of women*. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=6772133&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=2&Language=E>
- Thomas, J. J., Weigel, T. J., Lawton, R. K., Levendusky, P. G., & Becker, A. E. (2012). Cognitive-behavioral treatment of body image disturbance in a congenitally blind patient with anorexia nervosa. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, (169)1, 16-20.

For more information, support and resources, contact NEDIC

200 Elizabeth Street, ES 7-421 ■ Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
 Phone (Toronto area): 416-340-4156 ■ Toll-free phone: 1-866-NEDIC-20  
 Website: [www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca) ■ Email: [nedic@uhn.ca](mailto:nedic@uhn.ca)