

males & disordered eating

a guide for parents and youth



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What Is the Concern?

Disordered eating issues are mainly associated with girls and women, but boys and men are just as susceptible as females. While males with disordered eating issues display the same kinds of emotional, physical, and behavioral signs and symptoms as girls and women, males are less likely to be diagnosed with what is often seen as a stereotypically “female” health concern.

Instead, most people expect guys to be relaxed about their physical appearance. In reality, a lot of guys spend an excessive amount of time in front of the mirror, and worry just as much as girls do about the way they look.

Body image can be a real issue for guys, particularly as they go through puberty. Unlike girls, guys are less likely to talk with their parents or friends about changes to their bodies. As they are developing, some boys might want to lose weight, while others try to “bulk up” by gaining weight and working out at the gym. Since guys are expected to look tough and muscular, boys who think they are too small may turn to “quick fix” methods like using steroids or other dangerous drugs in order to build muscle mass.

We live in a society and culture which fixates on dieting and physical

appearance. People in advertisements rarely look like ordinary women and men. Just as women often compare themselves to the unrealistic, photoshopped images they see of fashion models and thin actresses and music celebrities, men are faced with male underwear models in advertisements, and guys on the front pages of men’s fitness magazines with “perfect” bodies featuring six-pack abs, bulging pectorals and ripped biceps.

Advertising for men’s hair and skin care products as well as weight loss and workout programs also endorse images of tall, muscular guys. This can lead to the same kind of low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and weight obsession that often affects girls and women who read fashion magazines, watch movies and reality television shows that perpetuate stereotypical standards of beauty.

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The good news is that negative male body image and self-esteem can become positive when we no longer struggle and obsess over the myth of attaining a perfect body.



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What can I do?

1. Recognize that no one is immune from disordered eating issues, and boys and men are just as vulnerable as girls and women are.
2. Know the risk groups for disordered eating in males, and the warning signs which include a preoccupation with dieting and weight loss, obsession with physique and muscle gain, as well as over exercising, social withdrawal, depression, irritability etc.
3. Understand how the media and advertisers manipulate and perpetuate social and cultural perceptions about men's ideal body image, masculinity, and sexuality in order to sell products so that companies can make a profit.
4. Realize that the media's portrayal of masculinity and the ideal male

physique is developed and reinforced at an early age, through the depiction of males in children's cartoons, in toy action figures, and in video games.

5. Be a role-model to yourself and others. Embrace and value the internal qualities that make guys attractive such as integrity, caring, and thoughtfulness; rather than conforming to society's focus on physical characteristics such as weight, height and muscularity.

Where do I go from here?

Jessie's Legacy, a program of Family Services of the North Shore provides web based eating disorders prevention resources to support BC youth, families, educators and professionals.

Visit www.familyservices.bc.ca.

how do I know if I'm at risk?

- ☐ You were overweight as a child and/or teased about your size.
- ☐ You are dieting, skipping meals, or using weight loss products.
- ☐ You participate in a sport where competition is based on weight classes like boxing, wrestling or mixed martial arts.
- ☐ Your sports activity may demand a particular body type (thin or big) in order to be competitive. Runners, swimmers, figure skaters, gymnasts and jockeys are at higher risk of developing anorexia and bulimia, while weight lifters often focus on getting bigger (known as 'bigorexia').
- ☐ You have used steroids or dietary supplements to control weight and gain muscle.
- ☐ You have a job or profession that values appearance and a certain type of physique such as modeling or acting.
- ☐ You have a family history that is genetically predisposed to certain diseases (e.g. heart disease) that you are trying to avoid.
- ☐ You have experienced a traumatic event such as an accident or the death of a family member or friend. Sexual, emotional, and physical abuse can also act as a trigger.



heretohelp

Mental health and substance use
information you can trust

HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners For Mental Health and Addictions Information. The BC Partners are a group of nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families manage mental health and substance use problems, with the help of good quality information. We represent Anxiety Disorders Association of BC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, Centre for Addiction Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health, Jessie's Legacy—a program of Family Services North Shore, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.