

Eating Disorder Myths

Myth – Eating disorders revolve around food

Truth

Eating Disorders are complex illnesses with biological, psychological, and sociological underpinnings. While behaviors associated with eating disorders may begin with a fixation on calories and weight, eating disorders generally stem from issues beyond food and body size, and signify an attempt to control some thing of substance in an individual's life. The mistaken belief that eating disorders are about food compels friends and loved ones to encourage individuals to "just eat" when in fact, the disorder from which they are suffering is incredibly complex.

Myth – Eating disorders are an illness of choice

Truth

Eating disorders are a mental illness, and no one chooses to have an eating disorder. The men, women and children suffering from an eating disorder are generally wonderful people with a horrible illness. They're often the best and the brightest, come from good families that care deeply about their well-being and, on the surface, look like they have everything in the world going for them. Individuals suffering from eating disorders can't "just eat", and recovering from the disease is far more complicated than simply making healthy lifestyle choices.

Myth – Eating disorders aren't serious illnesses

Truth

The mortality rates associated with eating disorders are the second highest of any mental illness, including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. Even for patients whose eating disorders don't prove fatal, there are often severe medical complications associated with starvation and purging that can eventually result in bone disease, cardiac complication, gastrointestinal distress, organ failure, infertility and death.

Myth – Dysfunctional families cause eating disorders

Truth

While previous models of eating disorder treatment viewed families and dysfunctional dynamics therein as a contributing cause of these illnesses, the community has moved away from the blaming of families toward an understanding that families are not a cause, but rather an integral part of eating disorder recovery. While families don't cause eating disorders, these illnesses have been shown to run in families. Those that develop an eating disorder likely had a latent genetic predisposition toward the illness, and a precipitant event, such as going on a diet, a traumatic event, or significant life changes which triggered their anorexia, bulimia or related disorder.

Myth – Eating disorders are a women's illness

Truth

While eating disorders involve many women's issues and females represent a large part (90 percent) of the affected population, research suggests that male eating disorders now account for at least 10 percent of all cases. Interestingly, despite significant biological, psychological, and sociological differences between men and women, the etiology of eating disorders remains fairly constant between the two genders. Like in their female counterparts, eating disorders in men and boys are genetic in nature and are often supported by the psychological and sociological pressures such as traditional gender roles and socially accepted ideas about masculinity.
