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Eating disorders affect millions of men, boys

By ROBERT VILLANUEVA
The News-Enterprise

Anorexia, bulimia and binge eating describe behaviors many might associate with women.

But experts say men suffer from the same eating disorders and the number of reported cases is on the rise.

Millions of men and boys battle all forms of the illness, according to the National Eating Disorders Association. Though it has been estimated that 10 percent of individuals with eating disordered are male, recent research suggests the number is much higher, reports NEDA.

Josey Crew, Lincoln Trail District Health Department WIC/nutrition coordinator and dietitian, noted the upswing of reported cases of men with eating disorders. But the rise in numbers might have more to do with public acceptance of the problem.

"Yes, there has been an increase," Crew said. "It is because more males are seeking help."

Men typically have binge eating or compulsive

Body image is a main feature to eating disorders and usually relates to an underlying concern, like poor self-esteem or identity issues."

Josey Crew Lincoln Trail District Health Department WIC/Nutrition Coordinator and Dietitian

overeating, disorder, Crew said. It is characterized by eating large amounts of food in short periods of time loss of control over eating and depression from the behavior, she said.

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EATING DISORDERS.

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"Actually around 40 percent with this type of (eating disorder) are males," Crew said.

Another type of eating disorder on the increase in men is muscular dysmorphia, or "bigorexia," she said. This disorder typically involves men who spend many hours at the gym lifting weights and bodybuilding.

Men with muscular dysmorphia might keep gaining muscle but think it's not enough, turning to "drastic measures to support their ideal image," Crew said.

"Body image is a main feature to eating disorders and usually relates to an underlying concern, like poor self-esteem or identity issues," she said.

Anorexia and bulimia in men, while less common, do occur and are "severe, life-threatening" disorders, according to NEDA.

Crew said symptoms of anorexia include refusal to maintain body weight at or above a normal weight for age and height, misconception of healthy weight and denial of low weight. Symptoms of bulimia, she said, include preoccupation with weight, regular consumption of large amounts of food, regular vomiting, use of laxatives or obsessive exercise.

The dangers of eating disorders are numerous, she said, and though different disorders have different symptoms all affect the whole body, "physically, emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally and socially."

Eating disorders result in damage to and function of body organs, slow heart rate, dehydration, tooth decay, diabetes, ulcers and muscle weakness, among other things, Crew said.

"There seems not to be huge differences in dangers from female to male of eating disorders," she said. "They affect the same areas."

Risk factors for eating disorders include depression and homosexuality, Crew said. More than 40 percent of men with eating disorders are homosexual, she said.

A man who suspects he might have an eating disorder should let his health provider know so he can be referred to a dietitian and counselor who specializes in treating eating disorders, Crew said. Men who wish to remain anonymous can call a help line, such as the National Association for Males with Eating Disorders (N.A.M.E.D.) which runs a toll-free help line at 1-877-780-0080.

Many other programs are available, too, Crew said. The key is to begin the process.

"No matter where they seek help, it's so important that they take that first step to reach someone, even if just a friend or family member," Crew said.

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