



YOUNG MALE HEALTH: BODY AND EATING DISORDERS

By the time most American adolescents reach the age of 13 they've stopped seeing a pediatrician – over 80% of all pediatric visits are by children under 13.¹ Less than half of adolescent and young adults have primary care visits within the last year.² Males are less likely than their female counterparts to seek care.^{3,4,5} Females have a relatively seamless transition with age with gynecologists accounting for 23-42% of AYA female preventive visits.⁶ For males, however, there is no similar continuity of care. On the whole, with the exception of episodic school exams, sports physicals and visits to the ER, once they leave the pediatrician's office adolescent and young adult males are left outside of our health care system, a pattern that extends into adulthood.

Yet, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, young males, or males within the age range of 10 to 27, are at higher risk than their female contemporaries for:

- ▶ Certain eating and body disorders
- ▶ Certain sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- ▶ Violence and trauma, including homicide
- ▶ Abuse of certain substances
- ▶ Certain mental health conditions, including ADHD and autism spectrum disorders
- ▶ Suicide
- ▶ Accidental injury

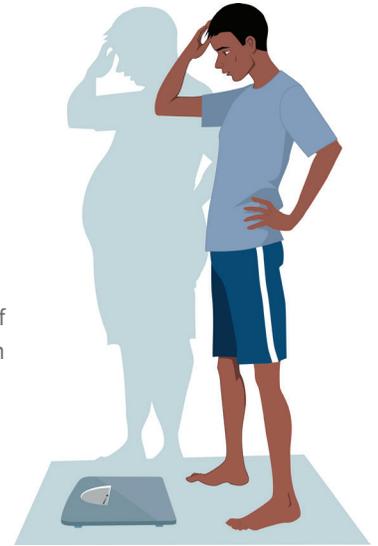
BODY IMAGE: DIET, SUPPLEMENTS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- ▶ While disturbances of body image and diet are less prevalent in young males than young females, they are more common than generally believed.
- ▶ Nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives.⁷
- ▶ A large 2013 study⁸ of teenage males 12 to 18 found that those who were worried about their muscularity (19%) used unhealthy supplements, such as growth hormone and steroids. These males were twice as likely as their peers to binge drink and use drugs, including cocaine, crack, ecstasy or methamphetamines.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)

- ▶ BDD is a disorder characterized by excessive preoccupation with an imagined defect in physical appearance or markedly excessive concern with a slight physical anomaly. The preoccupation is typically accompanied by frequent checking of the defect.⁹

- ▶ In the United States, BDD occurs in about 2.5% in males, and in 2.2% of females. BDD often begins to occur in adolescents 12-13 years of age.
- ▶ While BDD affects males and females about equally it expresses itself differently in males. Men are more likely than women to be concerned with issues involving muscle, and BDD affects occupation more in men than women.¹⁰ Put another way, males with BDD often develop something called bigorexia, or muscle dysmorphia.



MUSCLE DYSMORPHIA, ALSO KNOWN AS "BIGOREXIA"

- ▶ 22% of young men turn to potentially dangerous methods to "bulk up," according to a recent study.¹¹ These unhealthy methods -- dubbed "disordered eating behaviors" -- include eating to gain weight and using supplements or anabolic steroids to increase muscle or body size.
- ▶ Symptoms of eating disorders in young males may also include over-exercise and preoccupation with body shape and musculature. Weight loss or gain may occur. Other compulsions may include squandering excessive amounts of money on supplements, abnormal eating patterns, or use of steroids.¹² The symptoms can go undetected for long periods of time because they may not be alarming to parents, teachers or coaches. Positive feedback may inadvertently encourage an athlete to continue the eating disorder practices, thinking that losing more weight will lead to even further success.¹³

EATING DISORDERS

- ▶ Those with eating disorders develop habits that can cause a great deal of harm. They may fast or severely restrict their calories, exercise for hours on end each day, or take other actions to prevent any weight gain. Even though they are often underweight, they have an intense fear of becoming fat. Usually appearing during adolescence or young adulthood, eating disorders can also develop during childhood or later in adulthood.

- ▶ They are much more common among women and girls, but men and boys account for about 5 to 15 percent of those with anorexia or bulimia and about 35 percent of those with binge eating disorder.¹⁴
- ▶ Boys worried about being thin are more likely to develop symptoms of depression.¹⁵
- ▶ Other symptoms of an eating disorder are anxiety and excessive exercising.¹⁶
- ▶ Almost 50% of people with eating disorders meet the criteria for depression, and those with eating disorders may suffer low self-esteem or engage in substance abuse.¹⁷
- ▶ The incidence of suicide is strongly correlated with eating disorders.¹⁸

OBESITY

- ▶ Adolescent males are more apt to be obese than are adolescent females.¹⁹
- ▶ Obesity is a risk factor for Type 2 diabetes,²⁰ and among 12 to 25 year olds, males have a prevalence of diabetes that is five times that of females.²¹
- ▶ Adolescent overweight/obesity may be a risk factor for cardiovascular disease later in adulthood.²²
- ▶ Young men with overweight/obesity are more likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors such as fasting, skipping meals, laxatives, diuretics, and binge eating than young men considered normal weight or underweight by body mass index.²³

RESOURCES

National Eating Disorders Association, Eating Disorders in Boys & Men [<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/learn/general-information/research-on-males>]

Muscle Dysmorphia & Body Image in Men [<https://bddfoundation.org/muscle-dysmorphia-body-image-in-men>]

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) and Youth [<https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/body-dysmorphic-disorder-bdd-and-youth>]

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- ⁴ Callahan ST, Cooper WO. Gender and Uninsurance Among Young Adults in the United States. Pediatrics. 2004;113:291-297.
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- ⁷ Neumark-Sztainer D. Can we simultaneously work toward the prevention of obesity and eating disorders in children and adolescents? Int J Eat Disord. 2005 Nov.
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- ⁹ APA Dictionary of Psychology. Body Dysmorphic Disorder.
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- ¹¹ Nagata, Jason M. et al, Predictors of muscularity-oriented disordered eating behaviors in U.S. young adults: A prospective cohort study. International Journal of Eating Disorders. June 20, 2019.
- ¹² Eating Disorders in Men & Boys. National Eating Disorders Association
- ¹³ Bratland-Sanda, S., & Sundgot-Borgen, J. Eating Disorders in Athletes: Overview of Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Recommendations for Prevention and Treatment. European Journal of Sport Science. 2013.
- ¹⁴ Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Understanding anxiety related illnesses. Eating disorders.
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ National Eating Disorders Association. Men and Eating Disorders
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Psycom.net. Eating Disorders and Suicide: 6 Signs of Suicidal Thinking.
- ¹⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2017. 2018.
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- ²¹ Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet - England, 2011. Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet.
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