

Linden Oaks expert: Men aren't immune when it comes to eating disorders

Erin Terada, LCP, is Linden Oaks Behavioral Health's new Clinical Director of Eating Disorder Services.

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A muscular guy on a college wrestling team isn't the image that typically comes to mind when thinking about eating disorders. Many would picture a young woman who has limited what she eats until she is dangerously underweight.

The truth is eating disorders can afflict people of either gender from a wide range of ages, occupations and ethnic backgrounds.

According to **Erin Terada, LCP**, the newly promoted Clinical Director of Eating Disorder Services at Linden Oaks Behavioral Health, "More robust research on males with eating disorders is needed, but studies to date suggest that males account for about 20 percent of anorexia sufferers and about 40 percent of those with a binge eating disorder."

Three of the most common eating disorders increasingly experienced by men are:

- **Anorexia nervosa**, marked by a determination to maintain a weight that's below the normal range. Men with this disorder have a significantly distorted perception of their size and build and considerable dissatisfaction with their bodies.
- **Bulimia nervosa**, which involves recurring episodes of compulsive overeating, followed by purging to avoid weight gain. Men with this disorder are more likely than women to purge through excessive exercise, while women with bulimia are more likely to rely on laxatives or self-induced

vomiting. However, both sexes might try a variety of purging methods.

- **Binge eating disorder**, which also features regular bouts of compulsive overeating, but there's no attempt to purge.

"For males the eating disorder tends to be a means to an end," says Terada. "Some may want to be more athletic or have more muscle definition. Women tend to be more driven by the infinite quest to become thin and beautiful. For either sex, there may be a genetic predisposition, or they may have learned certain attitudes about body image and eating in their home environments. Both males and females look to these behaviors to help numb their anxiety and other negative emotions."

Males at higher risk of an eating disorder are those in athletic activities where weight affects their ability to compete, such as wrestlers, jockeys and dancers. Another risk factor that's more common for men than women is a history of being obese as a child or adolescent, especially if their weight made them a target for bullies.

At Linden Oaks, treatment of eating disorders is individualized and depends on the nature and severity of the eating disorder and whether there are other issues, such as depression, substance abuse or extreme anxiety. There are several outpatient options available, as well as inpatient treatment for patients who need to be stabilized, either emotionally or because of physical conditions, such as malnutrition.

Terada says she sees more males coming in for treatment in recent years. She says, "This suggests there has been at least some lessening of the stigma that assumed only women develop eating disorders."

Terada brings to her new role more than 10 years' clinical experience, including two years as a clinical therapist in the Linden Oaks eating disorders program. Prior to that, she completed a post-doctorate fellowship where she focused on eating disorders and self-injurious behaviors.

For more information, visit www.eehealth.org/services/behavioral-health. For immediate assistance and a free and confidential mental health assessment, call the Linden Oaks 24/7 Help Line at (630) 305-5027.