

Eating disorder Web sites not harmless

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Pro-eating disorder Web sites claiming to help adolescents with eating disorders can do more harm than good, a California university study found.

The study, appearing in the December issue of *Pediatrics*, is the first to confirm that pro-eating disorder Web sites could promote dangerous behavior, Stanford University researchers said.

Nearly 50 percent of patients visiting such sites reported learning about new methods to lose weight or to purge, researchers said. Teens surveyed also were likely to have an eating disorder longer, spent less time on school work and more time online weekly than patients who said they did not visit pro-eating disorder sites.

Up to an estimated 1 percent of adolescent and adult women are diagnosed as anorexic, and another 1 percent to 2 percent are diagnosed as bulimic.

"If parents wouldn't let their kids go out to dinner or talk on the phone with someone they don't know, they should ask themselves what their child might be up to on the computer," Rebecka Peebles, co-author and medical school pediatrics instructor, said of the findings. "Parents and physicians need to realize that the Internet is essentially an unmonitored media forum."

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