

## Anorexia affects men, too

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(PhysOrg.com) -- While eating disorders are unusual among men, the consequences can be just as devastating as for women says Dr. Jean Wilkins, a professor at the University of Montreal Faculty of Medicine and pediatrician at Sainte-Justine University Hospital Research Center.

“In both sexes, anorexic behavior emerges when a vulnerable individual experiences the unique sensation of food deprivation,” says Dr. Wilkins. “We can also draw parallels with [drug addiction](#), which begins when a fragile individual first consumes a toxic product. That is why we must view eating disorders as addictions. Food deprivation is an intoxicating and legal drug.”

“It's only in the early 1980s that young girls began showing up to our clinic with eating disorders,” says Dr. Wilkins who has seen many patients come through his office during his 30-year career.

“Traditionally, we treated [teenage girls](#) from wealthy families who were model students and tried to satisfy the expectations of everyone around them. Today, the disease afflicts boys and girls from all walks of life.”

Some clinicians believe that homosexuality could predispose teenagers to [anorexia](#). Statistics vary, yet homosexual boys are reportedly more susceptible to strive for male model looks. “Often parents worry about the sexual orientation of their anorexic son because he doesn't seem interested in girls,” says Dr. Wilkins. “This is normal because anorexia causes a decrease in libido. These teenagers aren't necessarily homosexual. With time, it falls into place and they reconnect with their original [sexual orientation](#).”

According to Dr. Wilkins, food deprivation is symptomatic of a larger problem in teen development. An absent parental figure, hypersensitivity, a recent or [childhood trauma](#) are often associated with the affliction.

“It's a complex disease that is difficult to treat,” says Dr. Wilkins. “Teenagers typically deny there is a problem. Anorexia is a refuge where they can hide and fill some emotional void. The control they have on their hunger and their weight is perceived as a personal victory over their entourage. It's a way to assert oneself and adopt a necessary but temporary identity.”

A new trend in anorexia, Dr. Wilkins warns, is how the growth-stunting condition is being diagnosed amid increasingly young children. “Before puberty, bones harden, the heart becomes stronger and the brain expands to prepare the body for the upcoming growth spurt that will occur during adolescence,” he says. “In anorexics, this entire process is slowed and the disease poses risks for the development and health of its victims. The younger kids develop anorexia the higher the risk that it will affect them for many years.”

Provided by University of Montreal

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