

World's first trial of new anorexia treatment

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(Medical Xpress) -- Researchers from the University of Western Sydney are trialling a new method of treatment for anorexia nervosa, which addresses the role of extreme exercise in perpetuating the dangerous and debilitating cycle of the disorder.

Professor Phillipa Hay, from the UWS School of Medicine, says compulsive and excessive exercise is a key feature of [anorexia](#) which presents in a majority of patients.

"In addition to having distorted views of their [body shape](#) and weight and disturbances in their eating behavior, many patients also experience a compulsion to push their body past its physical limits through exercise," says Professor Hay.

"Extreme exercise can be dangerous for anyone, but when coupled with the [poor health](#) and nutrition of anorexia patients it can lead to a tide of other [medical problems](#) and is often associated with higher levels of [psychological distress](#), longer hospital stays, and relapses from treatment."

In a world-first, the University of Western Sydney will trial a new method of anorexia treatment that looks specifically at the role of extreme exercise in the maintenance of anorexia.

The new treatment, which is based on the 'Loughborough [Eating disorders](#) Activity theraPy', (also known as 'LEAP') aims to promote healthy attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and equip patients with the

knowledge and skills to regain control over their exercise.

Professor Hay says the relationship between extreme exercise and anorexia has not been thoroughly examined by researchers and its serious impacts are not sufficiently addressed in current treatment programs.

"Anorexia treatments traditionally aim to prevent further physical harm by restricting patients to low impact exercises, such as yoga or walking, or banning patients from exercising entirely," says Professor Hay.

"However, this approach does not address the patients' underlying compulsions or addiction to exercise and does not consider that forcing them to stop exercising may have adverse psychological effects."

According to Professor Hay, LEAP is an innovative treatment which recognises anorexia patients' overwhelming urges to exercise and it allows them to develop the capacity to do so in a healthier way.

"Used in conjunction with a form of cognitive behavioural therapy, LEAP also aims to restore weight and normal eating habits by challenging underlying beliefs and thoughts through cognitive restructuring and behavior change."

The UWS study requires 100 adult volunteers with [anorexia nervosa](#) to participate in 34 free treatment sessions. The treatment sessions will be held in convenient locations in Campbelltown, Westmead or Camperdown.

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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