

# Anorexic individuals' disturbed body image influences unconscious movements

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Individuals suffering from anorexia nervosa perceive their bodies as being larger than they are and this disturbed body representation affects their movements, according to research published May 29 in the open access journal *PLOS ONE* by Anouk Keizer and colleagues from Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

Previous studies of anorexia nervosa have largely focused on patients' disturbed [perception](#) of [body image](#). Here, researchers examined how these disturbances may extend to unconscious, action-related representations of the body by asking anorexic and healthy participants to walk through a door and observing when they began to rotate their shoulders to squeeze through. While healthy participants started to turn when a doorway was about 25% wider, anorexic participants began to do so even when the opening was 40% wider than their shoulders.

Based on these observations, the authors conclude that anorexic patients' disturbed representations of their body size are more pervasive than previously thought, affecting both conscious and unconscious actions. The study concludes, "It appears that for [anorexia nervosa](#) patients, experiencing their body as fat goes beyond thinking and perceiving themselves in such a way, it is even reflected in how they move around in the world."

Keizer adds, "This is why we believe that current therapeutic interventions should not only focus on changing how patients think about their body and how they look at it, but also target the body in action, in

other words, treatment should aim to improve the experience of body size as a whole."

**More information:** Keizer A, Smeets MAM, Dijkerman HC, Uzunbajakau SA, van Elburg A, et al. (2013) Too Fat to Fit through the Door: First Evidence for Disturbed Body-Scaled Action in Anorexia Nervosa during Locomotion. PLOS ONE 8(5): e64602.

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