

Two in three 13-year-old girls afraid of gaining weight

December 16 2013

Six in ten 13-year-old girls, compared to four in 10 boys the same age, are afraid of gaining weight or getting fat according to new research on eating disorders from the UCL Institute of Child Health (UK) in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (UK).

Using data on over 7,000 participants in the Children of the 90s study at the University of Bristol (UK) from when they were aged 13 and 15, the study, which was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), showed that [girls](#) were more than twice as likely as boys to be 'extremely worried' of gaining [weight](#) or getting fat (11.5% v 4.7%).

It also found that:

- One in three girls (34%) and one in five boys (21%) were upset or distressed about weight and shape
- One in two girls (53%) and four in 10 boys (41%) avoided fatty foods
- A quarter of girls (26%) and one in seven boys (14.5%) had restricted their food intake (by fasting, skipping meals or throwing away food) in the previous three months
- Just over a quarter of girls (27%) and just under a quarter of boys (23%) had exercised to lose weight in the previous three months
- Using laxatives and making oneself sick for weight loss was rare at this age in both girls (0.23%) and boys (0.16%)
- Girls and boys who were worried about their weight and shape

and engaged in unhealthy weight-control strategies had 40% increased odds of being overweight and 90% higher odds of being obese at age 15

- Bingeing (excessive overeating with a feeling of losing control over what one is eating) affected girls (4.6%) and boys (5%) fairly equally and those who did binge had 50% increased odds of being overweight and had twofold increased odds of being obese at the age of 15

The research indicates that even in very early adolescence, eating disorder behaviours are not unusual, particularly in girls, and are reported by parents. It also shows that the eating problems have an impact on the child's mental health, and their social, personal and family life.

In what is believed to be the first report of its kind outside the USA, the researchers found that the patterns of eating-disorder behaviours seen amongst young teenagers in the population, although not amounting to full eating disorders, had negative consequences on young people's social, psychological and physical health. This has important implications for increasing efforts at identifying young people who have the behaviours shown in the study.

Speaking about the findings, the main author, Dr Nadia Micali, an NIHR clinician scientist, said:

'We have found that behaviours typical of an eating disorder are more common in early adolescence than previously thought, and not just in girls but also in boys, and that they are associated with a range of social and psychological problems in the child.

'Most importantly, we found a connection with certain behaviours and higher weight two years later, which has important public health

implications for the prevention of obesity.

'We are far from being able to identify [boys](#) and girls who have unhealthy weight control behaviours and binge-eating early, but this is crucial to prevent full-blown [eating disorders](#) and other negative social and emotional problems.'

More information: The paper, Micali, N et al, Frequency and Patterns of Eating Disorder Symptoms in Early Adolescence, is published online today, Tuesday 17 December 2013, in the Journal of Adolescent Health [www.journals.elsevier.com/jour ... f-adolescent-health/](http://www.journals.elsevier.com/jour...f-adolescent-health/), and can be downloaded here [fluff.bris.ac.uk/fluff/u1/indo ... NyItdIkzy_iPiX_XwJAp](http://fluff.bris.ac.uk/fluff/u1/indo...NyItdIkzy_iPiX_XwJAp)

Provided by University of Bristol

Citation: Two in three 13-year-old girls afraid of gaining weight (2013, December 16) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-year-old-girls-afraid-gaining-weight.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.
