

# Compassion key to treating eating disorders

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Credit: University of Queensland

Self-compassion is an important part of recovery for people with eating disorders, University of Queensland researchers have found.

The School of Psychology study reviewed the use of [compassion](#) focussed therapy (CFT) in the treatment of eating and weight concerns.

CFT, which has grown over the last two decades, encourages self-compassion to alleviate suffering that is created by an individual's self-criticism and shame.

UQ researcher Dr Stan Steindl said the review into CFT for eating

disorders (CFT-E) found promising results for adults with eating disorders, especially bulimia nervosa and obesity.

"CFT-E encourages people with eating disorders to treat themselves with kindness, wisdom, courage, and strength, rather than with criticism, hostility, and shaming," Dr Steindl said.

"It helps people to let go of the negative behaviours they use to control their food intake and their weight, and instead encourages them to eat regularly and adequately."

Eating disorders affect approximately nine per cent of the Australian population.

Obesity rates have increased 75 per cent among teens over the past 30 years, and adolescent girls with obesity are reported to have high levels of [disordered eating](#).

Dr Steindl said a major barrier to accessing treatment was that people with an [eating disorder](#) continued to experience high levels of stigmatisation from others, coupled with their own negative feelings.

"Self-criticism, self-directed hostility and shame contribute to the creation and continuation of eating disorders, and can also hinder the success of treatment," Dr Steindl said.

"People suffering from eating disorders often report that they are undeserving of compassion, they have a desire for love and kindness but feel lonely and rejected, and have simply never considered the value of self-compassion.

"CFT-E has been designed to incorporate the development and practice of compassion for self, and others, into standard eating disorder

treatment programs.

"Exciting opportunities now exist for clinicians and researchers to further explore the added value of compassion and self-compassion in the treatment of eating [disorders](#)."

Dr Steindl's review is published in *Clinical Psychologist*.

**More information:** Stanley R. Steindl et al. Compassion focused therapy for eating disorders: A qualitative review and recommendations for further applications, *Clinical Psychologist* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/cp.12126](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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