

Gay and bisexual adolescents found to have twice the risk of binge-eating disorder

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A new national study, published in the *Journal of Eating Disorders*, finds that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adolescents in the United States are more than twice as likely to report binge eating than their heterosexual

peers.

"Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual may face discrimination, bullying, and stigma because of their sexual orientation. These stressors can lead to poor self-esteem and disordered eating," says lead author Jason Nagata, MD, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. "Binge eating can result in [psychological effects](#) like depression and anxiety and long-term physical health problems including diabetes and heart disease."

The researchers analyzed data from 10,197 adolescents ages 10–14 years old who are part of the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study, the largest long-term study of brain development and [child health](#) in the United States. Data were collected from 2018-2020. Parents answered questions about their children's eating behaviors and adolescents were asked about their sexual orientation.

Binge-eating disorder is characterized by frequently consuming unusually large amounts of food and feeling unable to stop eating. Binge-eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the US although it is understudied and often misunderstood. The study also found that [adolescent boys](#) had 28% higher odds of [binge eating](#) than girls.

"Adolescent boys may have a drive for muscularity and larger size which can lead to consumption of larger volumes of food," says co-author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "In the context of muscularity-oriented goals, boys are more likely than girls to engage in 'cheat meals' which have been [linked with binge eating episodes](#)."

"Adolescents with eating disorders should seek professional help. Eating disorders are best supported by an interdisciplinary team including a mental health, medical, and nutrition provider," Nagata says. "Given the

higher risk of eating disorders in LGBTQ+ youth, it is important that health care providers foster a welcoming environment to youth of all sexual orientations and genders."

More information: Jason M. Nagata et al, The social epidemiology of binge-eating disorder and behaviors in early adolescents, *Journal of Eating Disorders* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s40337-023-00904-x](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-023-00904-x)

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