

# Eating disorders affect everyone regardless of race, gender or age, say experts

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The myth that "only skinny white affluent girls develop eating disorders" is to blame for other sufferers not getting diagnosed or treated, according to health experts.

Psychiatrist Janet Treasure, and GP Dr. Elizabeth McNaught, and therapist Jess Griffiths—who have both survived eating disorders—say this [stereotype](#) means that others including [black women](#) and men struggle to get help.

They are urging [clinicians](#) to regard all eating disorders as serious even if those that do not involve [weight loss](#) such as purging.

Professor Treasure, from Kings College London, Dr. McNaught and Jess also highlight the importance of early intervention in saving lives and the important role of fathers in helping girls recover.

Their [book](#), "Eating Disorders: The Basics"—endorsed by TV presenter and Strictly winner Stacey Dooley—is aimed at schools, health care professionals and families.

The guide details common risk factors, different types of eating disorders, the latest treatments, and offers advice to families on how to support loved ones to recovery.

"Eating disorders are often thought to affect skinny, white, affluent [girls](#). However, they lack any true discrimination in who they affect," say the authors.

"Other groups such as men, racial minorities, transgender individuals, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds can remain in our communities struggling with their eating disorder, left untreated for years.

"It's also essential that we recognize that all eating disorders are serious, and all eating disorders deserve treatment and support.

"They do not have to be lifelong or fatal illnesses, but often can be due

to a lack of provision and poor recognition of symptoms in people who are not underweight."

Disturbed behaviors around eating food are common worldwide. They can occur at any stage in life and affect everyone regardless of race, gender, or age.

Eating Disorders is based on the latest evidence on anorexia, bulimia, binge eating and other conditions.

The guide also features real-life accounts from individuals who have developed eating disorders and their letters of hope to support others still struggling.

Among these stories are those from patients who have been told they were not unwell enough to receive help.

Cara Lisette says her purging disorder has only ever been taken seriously when it has met the criteria for anorexia, despite the danger and distress associated with her condition.

She adds, "Most people with purging disorder will not become underweight, but that doesn't mean they are at a healthy weight for their body, and it doesn't mean they aren't causing harm to themselves. Purging can be fatal."

Christina Taylor was told in a letter that she wasn't worth helping because she was 'too healthy' despite drinking to excess and making herself sick up to ten times a day.

"This (receiving the letter) was one of the most invalidating experiences of my entire life. I genuinely felt there was no point going on."

Professor Treasure and her co-authors say that other challenges persist around eating [disorders](#) including:

- Food poverty, ultra-processed foods, and a reduction in shared, home-produced meals. These are among environmental factors behind [eating disorders](#).
- Men can face societal pressures to "man up." This can lead to more secrecy about their disorder and create a barrier to seeking treatment.
- Body Mass Index (BMI) can be unhelpful in a range of situations. The authors say the risk of being physically unwell is related to the degree of weight loss rather than absolute weight. Someone may be at risk of significant physical harm while being at a "normal" BMI.
- Fathers and partners can feel excluded as if an eating disorder is "women's business" and siblings may be deemed too young to be involved. Yet the authors say they have a key role in supporting loved ones to recover.

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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