

# Anorexia nervosa can be life-threatening in males

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Anorexia nervosa affects males as well as females, and affected males have a sixfold higher mortality rate than males in the general population. A new article published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*

aims to raise awareness of this life-threatening eating disorder.

"Early identification and prompt treatment are essential," writes Dr. Basil Kadoura, a specialist in [adolescent health](#), British Columbia Children's Hospital and University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, with co-authors.

Five things to know about [anorexia](#) nervosa in males:

1. Up to 0.3% of males will be diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. Stigma, poor mental health literacy and gendered stereotypes reduce help-seeking behaviors and lead to delayed treatment and worse outcomes.
2. Certain adolescent males are at higher risk. Athletes involved in body- and strength-focused sports like cycling, running, and wrestling, are at a higher risk of developing the disorder, as are racially and ethnically diverse males and gay, bisexual, trans, and queer people.
3. Screening for muscle-enhancing goals and behaviors is important to assess for anorexia nervosa. Diet changes, vomiting, over-exercising, and supplement and anabolic steroid use are potential red flags. The Muscularity Oriented Eating Test is a tool used to assess for these eating behaviors.
4. Complications can be life-threatening. These include vital sign instability, slower than normal heart rate, electrolyte abnormalities and other conditions. A detailed history, [physical examination](#) and bloodwork will help identify serious medical issues and guide treatment.
5. Family-based treatment is recommended for outpatients. In this guideline-recommended approach, parents are considered experts in their adolescent and lead in re-nourishing their child.

"Most adolescent males with anorexia nervosa can be treated as

outpatients with family-based treatment and ongoing medical monitoring. However, some adolescents may require treatment in hospital," write the authors.

**More information:** Anorexia nervosa in adolescent males, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2024). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.230001](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.230001)

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