

Patients with eating disorders have an increased risk of autoimmune diseases

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Finnish researchers have observed an association between eating disorders and several autoimmune diseases with different genetic backgrounds. These findings support the link between immune-mediated mechanisms and development of eating disorders.

The risk of eating disorders has been shown to be increased in some somatic illnesses. Many of these illnesses, such as type 1 diabetes and inflammatory bowel diseases, present autoimmune etiology. In addition, a prior autoimmune disease has recently been shown to increase the risk of mood disorders and schizophrenia.

Researchers at the University of Helsinki, Helsinki University Central Hospital and National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland, aimed to address the prevalence and incidence of autoimmune diseases in a large Finnish patient cohort with anorexia nervosa, [bulimia nervosa](#) and binge eating disorder.

Patients (N=2342) treated at the Eating Disorder Unit of Helsinki University Central Hospital between 1995 and 2010 were compared with general population controls (N=9368) matched for the age, sex and place of residence. Data of 30 autoimmune diseases were from the Hospital Discharge Register from 1969 to 2010.

"We found that of patients with eating disorders, 8.9% had been diagnosed with one or more autoimmune diseases. Of the control individuals, the number was 5.4%," tells Dr. Anu Raevuori from the University of Helsinki.

The increase in endocrinological diseases was explained by type 1 diabetes, whereas Crohn's disease contributed most to the risk of gastroenterological diseases.

The higher prevalence of autoimmune diseases among patients with eating disorders was not

exclusively due to endocrinological and gastroenterological diseases; when these two categories were excluded, the increase in prevalence was seen in the patients both before the onset of the eating disorder treatment and at the end of the follow-up.

"Our findings support the link between immune-mediated mechanisms and development of eating disorders. Future studies are needed to explore the risk of [autoimmune diseases](#) and immunological mechanisms in individuals with [eating disorders](#) and their family members," Dr. Raevuori states.

More information: Raevuori et al: "The Increased Risk for Autoimmune Diseases in Patients with Eating Disorders." *PLoS ONE* (22 Aug, 2014) dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0104845

Provided by University of Helsinki

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