

WHO IS AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING AN EATING DISORDER?

Everyone! In every race, culture, age group, and sex there are people with eating disorders. Yet, here are groups who are at a greater risk:

Females: Because of the increased number of media images portraying 'thin and perfect' models, many girls struggle with body image issues that potentially result in eating disorders.

Youth: Early adolescence to early adulthood with 11 and 17 identified as times for increased vulnerability. Perhaps they represent time of change. The 11 year old may be experiencing changes in her body hormonally as she becomes ready to get her periods. Often there is increase in fat in 'all the wrong places' creating anxiety. Perhaps it is even more difficult when the school, in a well meaning attempt to have children be healthy, measure body fat. Of course, there is always the issue of boys and what culture tells about having an attractive body.

The onset of eating disorders can occur at any age, however and the age of onset does appear to be getting younger.

Eating disorders can occur at any time and certainly reports of adult onset and individuals at 70 years of age have been reported.

Males: Increasing we are becoming more aware of eating disorders in males. For adults, the approximate ratio of men to women is 1:10. About 20-30% of younger anorexics are male. We probably are not identifying the disorder because of the stereotyping that this is a female illness. There are probably as many bulimic men than there are anorexic women.

Minorities: Once considered an illness of affluent white females, the picture has dramatically changed. In the US, eating disorders appear to be as common among Hispanic as well as Caucasian women. Recent focus of African American women indicates that it is more common than expected. Black women are prone more to bulimia nervosa and abuse of laxatives. There appears to be an overall increase in other countries.

Athletes: Women participating in certain sports such as gymnastics and distance running are especially vulnerable. Men involved in wrestling are often at risk as they attempt to make weight.

Genetics: Evidence is pointing to the fact that there is a strong genetic component to the illness. There also seems to be some sort of relationship between eating disorders and substance abuse, affective disorders (depression and bipolar) and anxiety disorders.

Source: Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
www.anad.org