



ABC Media Information

At the root of almost all eating disorders is an emotional cause - a psychological illness such as depression or a response to events linked to change or loss that create distress, for example, bereavement, separation. There is also a strong correlation between abuse and the development of an eating disorder. Eating disorders affect more women than men – (statistic), however figures reveal a rise in the number of men affected (25%). This increased figure is likely to reflect only a small percentage of the number of men struggling, as a result of the misconception that an eating disorder only affects women and the stigma that prevents men from coming forward and seeking help.

Eating disorders initially develop as short-term coping mechanisms – a response to a situation or feeling of distress, anxiety or instability. What often begins as a perceived form of controlling chaotic feelings or events, can then develop into a psychological illness that controls the person - their thoughts and behaviours. All professional guidelines on treatment stress the importance of accessing support before this point is reached and the illness develops, which in its nature becomes increasingly resistant to treatment. This is particularly the case with Anorexia Nervosa and a falling BMI.

Responding to Common Misconceptions

Eating disorders only affect teenage girls

Although young people, aged 14-25 are most at risk of developing eating disorders, they also affect adults, some who develop an eating disorder later in life and others who experience forms of relapse. The majority of callers to our helpline are aged between 21 and 40, but we have provided support for those as young as 4 and for those aged between 65 and 70.

Eating disorders are about body image

Due to the emotional underlying cause of an eating disorder, this is a mistruth but more dangerously, a misconception that trivialises the serious physical and psychological effects of an eating disorder.

Eating disorders are all about control

Eating disorders are complex illnesses and what may begin as a way of coping with difficulty or emotional distress, becomes a voice that controls the person struggling often to a point of serious physical and mental risk.

Does the media cause eating disorders?

Essentially, no – eating disorders are complex and often have multiple root causes, which are usually related to an emotional issue. However, it is untrue to state that the media does not play its part in sowing the seeds of low self-worth, low self-esteem and poor body image. These factors can make a person vulnerable to developing an eating disorder, especially if they may already be struggling with life. The symbol of the modern ‘perfect’ body and its related attributes has been created by the fashion, dieting and fitness industries and it is true to say that it has affected our expectations of image, in others, but most significantly, in ourselves. These unattainable expectations create dissatisfaction and breed upon insecurities, leading people who may already be struggling with low self-esteem or poor confidence to believe the answer to their problems may lie in losing weight.

Our Statistics

ABC conducted a professional research study into primary healthcare for eating disorders in 2014, prior to our November Change Campaign at the Houses of Parliament. The research attracted significant publicity, generating interviews with BBC Radio 4 for Women’s Hour, BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC Scotland. Our research proved the anecdotal evidence from the thousands annually to our helplines that patients spend far too long waiting for treatment after GP referral, the majority at least over a month and many 4 months, 6 months and even 9 months. GPs are vital as they bear the brunt of the professional support during the wait and even after, providing vital medical monitoring to protect people’s hearts and minds from an ever-decreasing BMI and yet over a third of patients revealed that they were never offered any medical monitoring *at all* for their condition.

The vast majority of patients (88%) say no advice was available to their support network.

There’s also concern that a third (33%) of respondents say no offer was made to monitor their physical health.

Over half of patients (51%) spent less than 10 minutes with their GP during their initial consultation

More than half (55%) had to go back multiple times before getting a referral.

Once they’d been referred, 48% had to wait over a month before their treatment started

Research was carried out by Vision Critical on behalf of Anorexia & Bulimia Care and cannot be reproduced without permission in writing. For the full survey results, please contact Imogen Smith at Imogen@anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk