

# Statistics: Eating Disorders and their Precursors

In the United States, **as many as 10 million females and 1 million males** are fighting a life and death battle with an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia. **Millions more** are struggling with binge eating disorder (Crowther et al., 1992; Fairburn et al., 1993; Gordon, 1990; Hoek, 1995; Shisslak et al., 1995).

Because of the secretiveness and shame associated with eating disorders, many cases are probably not reported. In addition, many individuals struggle with body dissatisfaction and sub-clinical disordered eating attitudes and behaviors. For example, it has been shown that **80%** of American women are dissatisfied with their appearance (Smolak, 1996).

- For females between fifteen to twenty-four years old who suffer from anorexia nervosa, the mortality rate associated with the illness is twelve times higher than the death rate of ALL other causes of death (Sullivan, 1995).  
*Please note, the heightened mortality rate applies only to those with anorexia and does not mean that anorexia is the leading cause of death among all females aged 15-24 in the general public.*
- Anorexia nervosa has the highest premature fatality rate of any mental illness (Sullivan, 1995).

In a 2003 review of the literature, Hoek and van Hoeken found:

- 40% of newly identified cases of anorexia are in girls 15-19 years old.
- Significant increase in incidence of anorexia from 1935 to 1989 especially among young women 15-24.
- A rise in incidence of anorexia in young women 15-19 in each decade since 1930.
- The incidence of bulimia in 10-39 year old women **TRIPLED** between 1988 and 1993.
- Only one-third of people with anorexia in the community receive mental health care.
- Only 6% of people with bulimia receive mental health care.
- The majority of people with severe eating disorders do not receive adequate care.

Despite its prevalence, there is inadequate research funding for eating disorders. Funding for eating disorders research is approximately 75% less than that for Alzheimer's disease. In the year 2005, the National Institute of Health (NIH) funded the following disorders accordingly:

Illness	Prevalence	Research Funds
<b>Eating disorders:</b>	10 million	\$12,000,000*
<b>Alzheimer's disease:</b>	4.5 million	\$647,000,000
<b>Schizophrenia:</b>	2.2 million	\$350,000,000

\* The reported research funds are for anorexia nervosa only. No estimated funding is

reported for bulimia nervosa or eating disorders not otherwise specified.

Research dollars spent on eating disorders averaged \$1.20 per affected individual, compared to \$159 per affected individual for schizophrenia.

## **American Public Opinion on Eating Disorders**

In March 2005, NEDA contracted with Global Market Insite, Inc. (GMI), a leader in global market research, to conduct a 1,500 nationwide sample of adults in the U.S. Their findings concluded from those surveyed that:

- Three out of four Americans believe eating disorders should be covered by insurance companies just like any other illness.
- Americans believe that government should require insurance companies to cover the treatment of eating disorders.
- Four out of ten Americans either suffered or have known someone who has suffered from an eating disorder.

## **Dieting and The Drive for Thinness**

- Over one-half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).
- Girls who diet frequently are 12 times as likely to binge as girls who don't diet (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).
- 42% of 1st-3rd grade girls want to be thinner (Collins, 1991).
- 81% of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat (Mellin et al., 1991).
- The average American woman is 5'4" tall and weighs 140 pounds. The average American model is 5'11" tall and weighs 117 pounds.
- Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women (Smolak, 1996).
- 46% of 9-11 year-olds are "sometimes" or "very often" on diets, and 82% of their families are "sometimes" or "very often" on diets (Gustafson-Larson & Terry, 1992).
- 91% of women recently surveyed on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting, 22% dieted "often" or "always" (Kurth et al., 1995).
- 95% of all dieters will regain their lost weight in 1-5 years (Grodstein, et al., 1996).
- 35% of "normal dieters" progress to pathological dieting. Of those, 20-25% progress to partial or full-syndrome eating disorders (Shisslak & Crago, 1995).
- 25% of American men and 45% of American women are on a diet on any given day (Smolak, 1996).
- Americans spend over \$40 billion on dieting and diet-related products each year (Smolak, 1996).

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**Please also cite the National Eating Disorders Association's Information and Referral Helpline: 1-800-931-2237 and website: [www.NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://www.NationalEatingDisorders.org)**