

## About eating disorders

### Classification & misconception

- An eating disorder is a complex mental illness that can lead to severe and permanent physical complications, and even death.<sup>1</sup>
- The symptoms of eating disorders involve obsessive control of food, weight and body shape in an attempt to manage feelings or underlying emotional and psychological difficulties. However, these behaviours result in just the opposite: feelings of hopelessness and self-loathing.<sup>2</sup>
- Eating disorders originate in the mind and manifest in the body.<sup>3</sup>
- Yet historically, eating disorders have been perceived as illnesses that focus on external factors – a physical ideal, the pursuit of aesthetic beauty, or body image.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite the commonly held misconception that eating disorders are a lifestyle choice, or a desire to have a more healthy physique the stark reality is that eating disorders are neither a choice, nor a diet, or a desire to become healthy.<sup>1</sup>
- IOI is reframing these misconceptions, by bringing the truth about eating disorders into the public domain.

### Multiple causes & burden

- There are four main types of eating disorders – Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder and Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorders (OSFED).<sup>1</sup>
- Eating disorders have multiple causes, including genetics, developmental challenges (including puberty or loss), thinking-styles (such as perfectionism), body dissatisfaction (body image has ranked among the top three concerns for young people over the past nine years<sup>4</sup> and socio-cultural pressures.<sup>3</sup>
- For the person affected, an eating disorder can become unrelenting torture. For families and loved ones, the burden of illness is among the highest of all mental illnesses.<sup>5</sup>
- Eating disorders have high mortality rates.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Eating disorders do not affect only girls and young women. Eating disorders can affect anyone, from any gender, or cultural background. They can commence at almost any age, but most commonly in adolescence.<sup>8</sup>
- Medical complications of eating disorders include cognitive impairment, heart complications, growth retardation and osteoporosis.<sup>9</sup>
- The isolating and tormenting nature of eating disorders can lead to depression, anxiety and suicide.<sup>10</sup>
- Approximately 1-in-20 Australian's is living with an eating disorder.<sup>11</sup>
- Importantly, eating disorders among men are significantly under-diagnosed.<sup>12</sup>

### About Anorexia Nervosa

- Anorexia Nervosa is mental illness with often devastating physical consequences. The illness is characterised by low body weight and body image distortion, with an obsessive fear of gaining weight which manifests through food deprivation. Anorexia Nervosa often coincides with increased levels of exercise.<sup>13</sup>
- Anorexia Nervosa has one of the highest mortality rates of all mental illnesses.<sup>6</sup>
- Approximately 83,500 Australian adults are currently living with Anorexia Nervosa.<sup>14</sup>
- Evidence suggests approximately 50 per cent of people living with Anorexia Nervosa will have a positive outcome, while 50 per cent will retain symptoms of the illness.<sup>15, 16</sup>
- On average, eight people are expected to die from Anorexia Nervosa **each week**, equating to 448 people per annum. One-in-five of those deaths is expected to be by suicide.<sup>6</sup>
- 1,900 Australians are expected to develop Anorexia Nervosa **each year**.<sup>14</sup>

## About Bulimia Nervosa

- Bulimia Nervosa is a mental illness characterised by recurrent binge-eating episodes (consumption of abnormally large volumes of food in a relatively short space of time). Binge episodes are associated with a sense of loss of control, immediately followed by feelings of guilt and shame which then leads to self-induced vomiting, fasting, over-exercising and/or misuse of laxatives, enemas or diuretics.<sup>17</sup>
- A person living with Bulimia Nervosa usually maintains an average weight, or may be slightly above or below average weight for their height, which often makes the illness less recognisable than severe cases of Anorexia Nervosa.<sup>15</sup>
- Because some people mistakenly assume that a person must be under-weight and thin to have an eating disorder, Bulimia Nervosa can often be missed, or go unnoticed for some time.<sup>15</sup>
- Approximately 120,000 Australian adults are currently living with Bulimia Nervosa.<sup>14</sup>
- On average, four people across Australia are expected to die from Bulimia Nervosa **each week**, equating to 200 people per annum.<sup>6</sup>

## About Binge Eating Disorder

- Binge Eating Disorder is a mental illness involving excessive consumption of food, often when not hungry. Binge eating can act to suppress emotions and distract from a person's problems. Feelings of guilt, disgust and depression often follow a binge eating episode.<sup>15</sup>
- Binge Eating Disorder is recurrent and more serious than over-eating.<sup>18</sup>
- Unlike Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder does not involve purging. However the illness can involve sporadic fasting and repetitive diets in response to negative feelings that follow a binge episode, as well as weight gain.<sup>18</sup>
- Approximately 2.8 per cent of Australian adults will develop Binge Eating Disorder during their lifetime.<sup>11, 19</sup>

**If you, or someone you know may be living with an eating disorder, please contact your GP or the National Eating Disorders Helpline – 1800 EDHOPE.**

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<b>MORE INFORMATION:</b>	<a href="http://www.insideoutinstitute.org.au">www.insideoutinstitute.org.au</a>
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