



## Boys and Eating Disorders

People tend to think that eating disorders affect only adolescent girls. However, studies show that men account for **10% to 25%** of all cases of anorexia and bulimia. That figure is as high as **40%** when it comes to binge-eating disorder.

There's also an emerging body image disorder, called **bigorexia**, that's found more often in boys. In fact, the majority of people who suffer from bigorexia are men, especially male athletes. Some studies even indicate that as much as **90%** of all those struggling with bigorexia are men.

### What is bigorexia?

Bigorexia or muscle dysmorphia, is characterized by a preoccupation with the idea that the body is too small and insufficiently muscular. Bigorexia is also called "inverse anorexia."

### What are the characteristics of the disorder? How can it be recognized?

People grappling with bigorexia,

- may set very **strict** rules for themselves about their diet and, in some cases, about the supplements they take;
- may take **steroids**;
- may train (in fact, **overtrain**) every day;
- feel **guilty** and **ashamed** when they fail to keep up the training routine they've established;
- are **obsessed** with their appearance and their muscles;
- **sacrifice** everything for sports and lose interest in everything else;
- have a **distorted view** of their body, i.e., believe that they are too small or insufficiently muscular, which causes them a great deal of psychological distress.

## **What are the consequences?**

Bigorexia can cause those afflicted enormous suffering. The physical and psychological consequences of the disorder include:

- depression
- insomnia
- feelings of emptiness
- irritability
- general exhaustion
- torn muscles
- tendonitis (inflammation usually due to overuse of the tendon leading it to rub on the bone)
- bone fractures

## **Impact of beauty standards imposed on men**

Men feel constant pressure to live up to the unrealistic beauty standards that society imposes on them through the media, i.e., to be tall, very muscular, have well defined abs, etc. These standards can result in significant dissatisfaction with body weight and shape.

A study published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders* (2019) found that, in the over 14,000 respondents, **22%** of the boys reported having problematic eating behaviours because of an obsession with training to become more muscular.

## **The taboo around men asking for help**

Unfortunately, society conveys the message that men should be strong, not express their emotions, and be able to solve their problems on their own. As a result, a lot of young men are ashamed to ask for support. It's important for people to realize that admitting they've got problems takes enormous courage. It's vital for us as a society to expose the misconception that asking for help is a sign of weakness. It isn't: it's a sign of great strength for anyone, including men, to seek help when they're suffering.