

Disordered eating among young adults found to have long-term negative health effects

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According to a recent University of Helsinki study, disordered eating among young adults has long-term effects on their health. Disordered eating among 24-year-old women and men was an indicator of higher body weight, larger waist circumference and lower psychological wellbeing as well as a lower self-evaluation of general health both at age 24 and ten years later.

"Disordered eating is often seen as harmless as it is so common. However, it seems that disordered eating may have far-reaching negative effects on the [general health](#) and wellbeing of [young adults](#)," says researcher Ulla Kärkkäinen, authorised nutritionist. "Even if the symptoms do not constitute a clinical eating disorder, early recognition and treatment is important, also for men."

Published in the European Eating Disorders Review, the study is part of the extensive FinnTwin 16 study, and included more than 4,900 young Finnish men and [women](#). The research participants answered questionnaires on eating behaviour, weight, health and psychological wellbeing at age 24 and again, ten years later at age 34.

When all variables were considered, disordered eating at age 24 was a predictor of lower psychological wellbeing among both women and men as well as a lower self-evaluation of health among men ten years later.

"These results prove that disordered eating is detrimental to the physical and mental health of young adults both in the short and long term.

Previous research has established that low psychological [wellbeing](#) and a poor self-evaluation of health are predictors of higher susceptibility to physical illness and mortality. To mitigate these long-term negative effects, we must recognise disordered eating early and direct sufferers to treatment," says Kärkkäinen.

Eating is disordered when a person arbitrarily decides when they are hungry or full, regardless of how they are feeling; weighs themselves constantly; or drinks non-caloric drinks to keep from feeling hungry. Eating can also be considered disordered if a person meticulously plans each meal long into the future, counts calories and weighs foods, follows an excessively strict diet or cuts certain foods from their diet claiming [health](#) or ethical reasons, when the real motivation is weight loss, describes Kärkkäinen.

"Even though [disordered eating](#) is common in the population, it is not harmless. Disordered eating among both women and men should be taken seriously," says Kärkkäinen.

More information: Ulla Kärkkäinen et al. Do Disordered Eating Behaviours Have Long-term Health-related Consequences?, *European Eating Disorders Review* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/erv.2568](https://doi.org/10.1002/erv.2568)

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