

# Eating disorders linked to exercise addiction

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New research shows that exercise addiction is nearly four times more common amongst people with an eating disorder.

The study, led by Mike Trott of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), was published this month in the journal *Eating and Weight Disorders - Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*.

The research is the first to measure rates of [exercise addiction](#) in groups of people with and without the characteristics of an [eating disorder](#). The meta-analysis examined data from 2,140 participants across nine different studies, including from the UK, the US, Australia and Italy.

It found that people displaying characteristics of an eating disorder are 3.7 times more likely to suffer from addiction to exercise than people displaying no indication of an eating disorder.

Trott, a Ph.D. researcher in Sport Science at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said: "It is known that those with eating disorders are more likely to display addictive personality and obsessive-

compulsive behaviours. We are also aware that having an unhealthy relationship with food often means an increased amount of exercising, but this is the first time that a risk factor has been calculated.

"It is not uncommon to want to improve our lifestyles by eating healthier and doing more exercise, particularly at the start of the year. However, it is important to moderate this behaviour and not fall victim to 'crash diets' or anything that eliminates certain foods entirely, as these can easily lead to eating disorders.

"Our study shows that displaying signs of an eating disorder significantly increases the chance of an unhealthy relationship with exercise, and this can have [negative consequences](#), including [mental health issues](#) and injury.

"Health professionals working with people with eating [disorders](#) should consider monitoring exercise levels as a priority, as this group have been shown to suffer from serious medical conditions as a result of excessive exercise, such as fractures, increased rates of cardiovascular disease in younger patients, and increased overall mortality."

**More information:** Mike Trott et al, A comparative meta-analysis of the prevalence of exercise addiction in adults with and without indicated eating disorders, *Eating and Weight Disorders - Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s40519-019-00842-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40519-019-00842-1)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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