

Anorexia Nervosa in Males

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Anorexia nervosa is a severe, life-threatening disorder in which the individual refuses to maintain a minimally normal body weight, is intensely afraid of gaining weight, and exhibits a significant distortion in the perception of the shape or size of his body, as well as dissatisfaction with his body shape and size.

Behavioral Characteristics:

- Excessive dieting, fasting, restricted diet
- Food rituals
- Preoccupation with body building, weight lifting, or muscle toning
- Compulsive exercise
- Difficulty eating with others, lying about eating
- Frequently weighing self
- Preoccupation with food
- Focus on certain body parts; e.g., buttocks, thighs, stomach
- Disgust with body size or shape
- Distortion of body size; i.e., feels fat even though others tell him he is already very thin

Emotional and Mental Characteristics:

- Intense fear of becoming fat or gaining weight
- Depression
- Social isolation
- Strong need to be in control
- Rigid, inflexible thinking, “all or nothing”
- Decreased interest in sex or fears around sex
- Possible conflict over gender identity or sexual orientation
- Low sense of self worth -- uses weight as a measure of worth
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Perfectionistic -- strives to be the neatest, thinnest, smartest, etc.
- Difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating
- Irritability, denial -- believes others are overreacting to his low weight or caloric restriction
- Insomnia

Physical Characteristics:

- Low body weight (15% or more below what is expected for age, height, activity level)
- Lack of energy, fatigue
- Muscular weakness
- Decreased balance, unsteady gait
- Lowered body temperature, blood pressure, pulse rate
- Tingling in hands and feet
- Thinning hair or hair loss
- Lanugo (downy growth of body hair)
- Heart arrhythmia
- Lowered testosterone levels

(Compiled by Tom Shiltz, MS, CADCIII, Rogers Memorial Hospital, Oconomowoc, WI. Reprinted with permission.
Source: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition. American Psychiatric Association, 1994.)