

EATING DISORDERS & BODY IMAGE ISSUES IN MALES

A quarter of eating disorder (ED) sufferers are male

WWW.SWEDAUK.ORG

TEL: 01749 343344

UK Registered Charity 1056441

UK Company Ltd by Guarantee 3208772

© Somerset & Wessex Eating Disorders Association 2022

SOMERSET & WESSEX EATING DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

ENGAGE ENABLE EMPOWER



While everyone is unique and has their own personal experience with their ED, some signs and symptoms are more commonly recognised in males. Men tend to develop body image issues that centre around muscle mass and stature and can present with symptoms of an ED at any age. EDs are often overlooked in men due to the continued stigma of an ED being a female disease. The reality is that EDs can and do affect people of all genders and ages. Use our helpful resource to recognise when you, a male relative or friend could be suffering from an ED.

MALE CELEBRITIES ARE OPENING UP ABOUT EDS
FROM SUCCESSFUL SPORTSMEN TO CHART-TOPPING SINGERS, EDS CAN AFFECT ANYONE. MANY MALE CELEBRITIES HAVE SPOKEN PUBLICLY ABOUT THEIR EDS. ELTON JOHN & FREDDIE FLINTOFF HAVE OPENED UP ABOUT THEIR STRUGGLES WITH BULIMIA & ZAYN MALIK HAS DISCUSSED HOW HE AVOIDED EATING IN ORDER TO FEEL HE HAD CONTROL OVER HIS LIFE.

AGES & ED STATISTICS



ATHLETES & SPORTSMEN



MUSCLE DYSMORPHIA

- Statistics from Beat suggest that 25% of ED sufferers are male.* Males can present with a wide range of EDs and can develop EDs at any stage in their lives.
- Estimates of possible eating, weight or shape concerns in men aged 16-75+ range from 6% to 20% Those aged 25-34 are the most affected.**
- Estimates of possible eating, weight or shape concerns in men and boys: 11-16 years 8.4%, 17-19 41% and 20-23% could be as high as 49%.***
- Estimates of the number of men who have an eating disorder which significantly impacts their life again varies by age group.

- Male sportsmen and athletes are more likely to develop an eating disorder than men in other professions. Their struggle is often overlooked due to the demands of their profession and the expectation of keeping their body in top condition to compete.
- In 2020, A Swiss study found elite male athletes had a prevalence rate of up to 32.4% and were most likely to be affected if they participated in weight-sensitive sports.* And in 2004, a Norwegian study found that male athletes were 13.5% more likely to develop an eating disorder than the general Norwegian population (4.6%).**
- Many famous male sports stars have been opening up about their struggles with EDs. Cricketer Freddie Flintoff discussed his struggles with bulimia in a BBC documentary, describing the media's coverage of his weight gain as being a major contributing factor to driving his body image issues.***

- Muscle Dysmorphia most typically presents as a male form of body dysmorphia. One in 10 men who go to the gym can develop muscle dysmorphia, which can also be known as Bigorexia - an illness that results in the individual thinking that their body is much smaller or skinnier than it actually is.
- The affected person will increase the amount of time in the gym, pumping iron, to increase their muscle mass. They focus on enhancing their physique and muscular tone to have the 'ideal' male body.
- This can also lead to different eating disorders due to the obsessive behaviour and rituals around eating the 'correct' food, possible leading to steroid abuse or other performance enhancing drugs. All this can lead to anxiety, depression and interfere with everyday life.
- Diagnosis can be tricky. Many men do not believe they have body image issues and don't seek help, instead believing they should have a body like the ones they see portrayed on social media.
- Though far less common, women can also become fixated with improving their muscle tone, going to the gym to body build and becoming restrictive and ritualistic around diet.

AGE GROUP	16-24	25-24	35-44	44-54	55-64	65-74	75+
PERCENTAGE	3%	4%	6%	3%	2%	2%	1%

In fact, all genders share the same percentage in this age range.

Sources:

* Karrer Y, Halioua R, Mötteli S, et al Disordered eating and eating disorders in male elite athletes: a scoping review BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine 2020;6:e000801. doi: 10.1136/bmjsem-2020-000801

** Sundgot-Borgen J, Torstveit MK. Prevalence of eating disorders in elite athletes is higher than in the general population. Clin J Sport Med. 2004 Jan;14(1):25-32. doi: 10.1097/00042752-200401000-00005. PMID: 14712163.

*** Burley L, Freddie Flintoff: Living with Bulimia [film], South Shore Productions, 2021, bbc.co.uk.

Sources:

* Statistics for Journalists, Beat, <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/media-centre/eating-disorder-statistics/>

** NHS Digital (2020) Health Survey for England

*** NHS Digital, 2021, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England