The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Muscularity-oriented disordered eating in adolescent boys and young men

Eating disorder screening has traditionally centred on thinness and weight loss. In some adolescent boys and young men, disordered eating may be driven by a different goal: becoming larger, leaner and more muscular. These presentations may go unrecognised.

How presentations may differ

Weight alone may not reveal disordered eating

Many are trying to gain muscle rather than lose weight, so BMI may not signal concern.

Muscularity and body shape concerns

Concerns may centre on shape and leanness rather than thinness.

Binge eating may be described differently

Binge episodes may be described as "cheat meals" and seen as positive within muscularity goals.

Exercise and other muscle-enhancing behaviours

Excessive exercise and the use of appearance- and performance-enhancing substances may also feature in muscularity-oriented presentations.

Muscle-enhancing behaviours to explore in assessment

1. ***High protein intake alongside restrictive dietary practices***
2. ***Compulsive or excessive exercise***
3. ***Use of muscle-building supplements, including protein powders and creatine***
4. ***Use of anabolic steroids and other appearance- and performance-enhancing substances***

These behaviours are not necessarily signs of an eating disorder. Their clinical significance should be considered in relation to preoccupation, distress, potential health risks and interference with daily functioning.



Join Dr Jason Nagata for an Update session exploring muscle dysmorphia and eating disorders in boys and young men.

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