

## Eating Disorders Podcast Script

Karen Carpenter became the face for anorexia nervosa. The complications of this eating disorder led to her death on February 4, 1983. Eating disorders are still impacting millions of people around the world, even if the conversation isn't as prevalent, especially in the media.

The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders found that approximately 30 million people suffer from an eating disorder in the United States.

The three main eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorder.

There is some overlap between the three, but individuals suffering from eating disorders all have one thing in common – they have extreme concerns about body weight and shape.

The basic definition of anorexia is an individual has very low body weight, typically less than 85% of their ideal weight according to that person's age, gender, and developmental trajectory.

There are two subtypes of anorexia. One is called the restrictor subtype. This follows the stereotype of anorexia – the individual engages in dieting and excessive exercise. The second subtype also includes overly dieting and exercising, but individuals also binge and purge.

However, some individuals are larger bodied and might not fall under 85% of their ideal body weight, but still suffer from anorexia.

Dr. Kelly Klump is a foundation professor in the psychology department at Michigan State University. She says patients would come into their office with symptoms of anorexia, but until 2013, there was no diagnosis to give these individuals.

"You have indications that for that person, their body weight is too low for their body type, their metabolism etc. Those individuals, we would now give a diagnosis of atypical anorexia nervosa."

There is some overlap between anorexia and bulimia.

People with bulimia share a lot of similar traits to those with anorexia binge-purge subtype. The main difference is a person's body weight – if it's above the 85% ideal weight, then they would be diagnosed with bulimia. Those with bulimia may also excessively diet and exercise, but their weight compared to where it should be is a main indicator of which eating disorder they are suffering from.

The last of the three main eating disorders is binge eating, which does not include purging. Those who have bulimia or binge eating disorder have normal to above normal weight.

When individuals partake in binge eating, it's usually highly palatable foods or foods typically high in fats and sugars like cupcakes or French fries.

"These are the same food that the individuals with the disorders often don't allow themselves to have when they are not binge eating. So, this ties into that strict dieting. So, after having a binge eating episode, for several days, the person will severely restrict their food intake."

A vast majority of eating disorders occur during late puberty and up until the age of 25. Klump says they don't typically see new cases before or after that developmental window.

"Many individuals will develop their eating disorder before 25 and then it will continue after 25 but we just don't see a lot of new onset cases after that age."

There are many stereotypes involving eating disorders – like the only ones suffering from them are vain girls. Klump says this is not the case.

"We do know that these disorders have significant genetic underpinnings and biological risk factors that actually parallel the genetic and biological risk factors of other forms of psychopathology like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, etc."

Like other psychological disorders, it is more likely for someone to have an eating disorder if someone else in the family already does. This is called familial aggregation.

Klump studies twins to see what extent eating disorders are genetic and environmentally influenced.

"We see the genetic risk the heritability is anywhere from 50 to 80% heritability of these illnesses suggesting absolutely the environment matters, but there's a strong genetic component as well."

Men also suffer from eating disorders. According to Klump, for every ten females suffering from anorexia, one male does. For every eight females suffering from bulimia, one male does. And for every two females suffering from binge eating disorder, one male does.

Another misconception is that only white middle to upper class people have eating disorders, but Klump says all ethnicities and income levels are susceptible.

"So, we see much higher rates than we ever thought of anorexia, particularly bulimia and binge eating disorder in black women, black men, Latinx individuals. In some cases, the rates are actually higher in those populations as compared to whites."

She also says those who experience poverty and disadvantage are at an increased risk for eating disorders as well, particularly bulimia and binge eating disorder.

Recently, the media has begun a push toward exercising and eating healthy, a drastic change from the previous trend of glamorizing incredibly skinny people, especially females.

Klump says it's a good thing the American culture is more accepting of larger bodies, but it's only seen a decrease in the prevalence of bulimia.

"The genetic risk may still be there, the biology majors are still there, but because you don't have that extreme cultural pressure as much, that might be why we're seeing fewer disorders."

But the cases of anorexia have not decreased.

"We think that there may be a very particular type of genetic and biological risk for anorexia nervosa that is more immutable to the environment and culture."

Eating disorders can be fatal. If the body isn't getting the proper nutrients to function, it can shut down.

"The person looks OK today, but then they leave your office and they have a week of not only not eating anything, but not drinking any fluids. Well within a week, that person's medical status can change dramatically."

The first step to overcome an eating disorder is to seek help. The National Eating Disorders website offers treatment advice and helps individuals select a treatment center.

Our next podcast episode focuses on stress eating and what people can do to cope with stress.