**There's a new group of women at risk of eating disorders**

According to a new study, middle-aged women are at risk

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**Eating disorders are often associated with the young.**

Think 'anorexia' and you'd be forgiven for imagining a teenage girl at the hard end of the suffering. According to [a new study](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2017-01/bc-eda011217.php) though, there's a group of people we haven't been paying attention to – middle-aged women.

A study of 5,320 women in the UK found that 3 per cent in their 40s and 50s had an "active" eating disorder. 15.3 per cent of women reported having suffered from an eating disorder during their lifetime.

More worryingly, just 30 per cent of those women said they had sought help.

These numbers were higher than originally imagined. Dr. Nadia Micali of the Department of Psychiatry at Icahn School of Medicine in New York and University College London says these new findings are a clear indication that it's not just women in the earlier stages of life who are at risk. "Both chronic and new onset disorders are apparent in mid-life."

The findings complement claims made by the organisation Eating Disorder Hope who [say that in the US](https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/treatment-for-eating-disorders/special-issues/older-women/causes), they have been seeing a "growing number of older women seeking treatment for eating disorders" over the past five to 10 years.

As well as looking at *who* was suffering, the study also looked at *why,* linking negative influences during early life and the later development of an eating disorder.

Anorexia and bulimia were reportedly 4-10 percent more likely if a woman had experienced unhappiness during childhood. Other factors included whether or not the subject had a good mother-daughter relationship and how sensitive they were to other people's emotions.

There's probably a wealth of reasons we're seeing more women in mid-life struggling with eating disorders. Stress, for instance, [has been linked to eating disorders](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/12/5-things-you-need-to-know_n_3070313.html) in the past and middle-aged women are [particularly prone](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11983974/Do-it-all-generation-of-women-suffering-work-stress-epidemic.html) as they try to juggle career and family life. Perhaps it's also down to our culture's obsession with youth, which is skewing our concept of what growing older actually looks like.

Dr. Micali, for her part, is mainly concerned about the number of women who didn't seek treatment. "We need to understand why many women did not seek help. It may be that there are some barriers women perceive in healthcare access or a lack of awareness among healthcare professionals."

Either way, now we know these women are out there, it's important to make sure they're not left behind.

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