

# EATING DISORDERS

## NOT JUST A PROBLEM FOR WOMEN

BY SHAWN RADCLIFFE

Conversations about eating disorders often focus on the struggles faced by women. But millions of men suffer from this illness, more than previously thought.

Even so, many men don't get the help they need, for a variety of reasons.

"I think that it's less likely to be diagnosed in men, because it's not on doctors' radars the same way it would be with women," says Natalie Wingfield, a counselor at Virginia Beach Counseling and Wellness in Virginia Beach.

According to the non-profit National Eating Disorders Association, 10 million men in the United States will be seriously affected by an eating disorder at some point in their life, compared to 20 million women.

Men are affected by the same forms of the illness as are women, including anorexia, bulimia and binge eating.

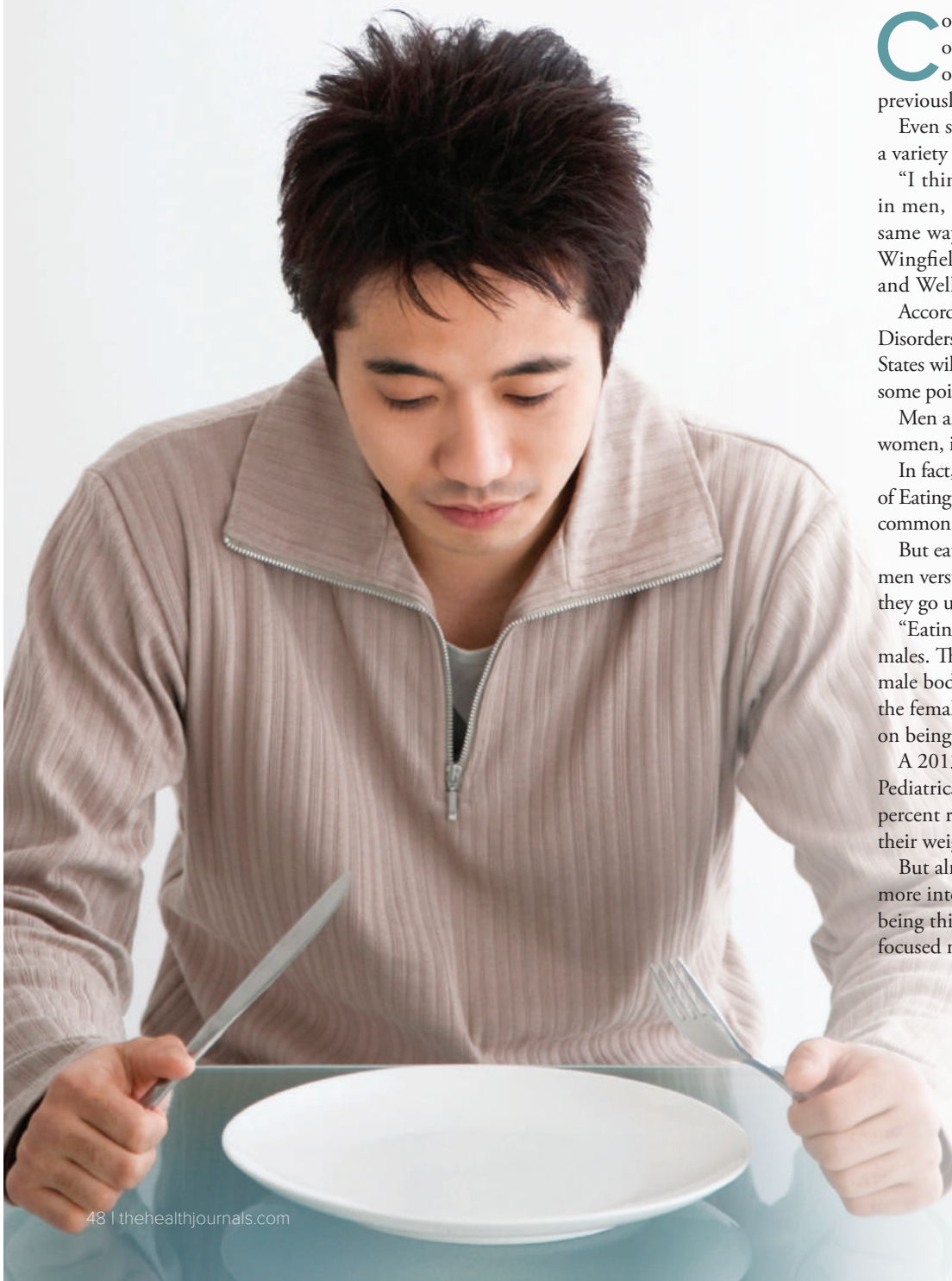
In fact, a 2012 study in the International Journal of Eating Disorders found that binge eating is just as common in men as in women.

But eating disorders can also show up differently in men versus women, which may be part of the reason they go undiagnosed in many men.

"Eating disorders present a little bit differently in males. There's more of a focus on a muscular, 'ideal' male body," says Wingman, "which is different from the female 'ideal' body that we might see, with a focus on being thin."

A 2013 study in the medical journal JAMA Pediatrics found that of 5,527 adolescent males, 17.9 percent reported feeling extremely concerned about their weight and physique.

But almost 10 percent of the teenage boys were more interested in increasing their muscle size than in being thin. Compare this to just 2.5 percent who were focused mainly on thinness.



Many of the tools that doctors use to diagnose eating disorders were designed with a desire for thinness in mind. These assessments may overlook men and boys who are concerned about their weight, but more focused on

protein, creatine and L-carnitine.

More than 40 percent reported that their use of these supplements increased over time. And 22 percent indicated that they were swapping regular meals for dietary supplements not meant to be used

around it," says Wingfield.

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gaining muscle mass.

The muscle-obsessed culture among men may also be driving them to develop their own male brand of eating disorder.

At an American Psychological Association meeting last year, researchers presented results from a survey of 195 men aged 18 to 65. They asked men about their use of legal workout supplements used to build muscle mass, such as whey


as meal replacements.

Even more alarming, says the researchers, is that 29 percent of the men were concerned about their own use of supplements.

Although some men are aware that they have an eating problem, they may be reluctant to seek help.

“Males tend to seek treatment less often because of the stigma that this is kind of a women’s thing and there’s a lot of shame

However, once men do show up, there are many good treatment options to help them.

“There’s still the same evidence-based treatments,” says Wingfield. “It’s typically cognitive behavioral therapy, but it’s also important to factor in the gender differences to make it feel more inclusive for males.” 



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