

# Orthorexia

Although not formally recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, awareness about orthorexia is on the rise. The term 'orthorexia' was coined in 1998 and means an obsession with proper or 'healthful' eating. Although being aware of and concerned with the nutritional quality of the food you eat isn't a problem in and of itself, people with orthorexia become so fixated on so-called 'healthy eating' that they actually damage their own well-being.

Without formal diagnostic criteria, it's difficult to get an estimate on precisely how many people have orthorexia, and whether it's a stand-alone eating disorder, a type of existing eating disorders like anorexia, or a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Studies have shown that many individuals with orthorexia also have obsessive-compulsive disorder.

## WARNING SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF ORTHOREXIA

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- Compulsive checking of ingredient lists and nutritional labels
- An increase in concern about the health of ingredients
- Cutting out an increasing number of food groups (all sugar, all carbs, all dairy, all meat, all animal products)
- An inability to eat anything but a narrow group of foods that are deemed 'healthy' or 'pure'
- Unusual interest in the health of what others are eating
- Spending hours per day thinking about what food might be served at upcoming events
- Showing high levels of distress when 'safe' or 'healthy' foods aren't available
- Obsessive following of food and 'healthy lifestyle' blogs on Twitter and Instagram
- Body image concerns may or may not be present

## HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF ORTHOREXIA

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Like anorexia, orthorexia involves restriction of the amount and variety of foods eaten, making malnutrition likely. Therefore, the two disorders share many of the same physical consequences.

## TREATMENT

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There are currently no clinical treatments developed specifically for orthorexia, but many eating disorder experts treat orthorexia as a variety of anorexia and/or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Thus, treatment usually involves psychotherapy to increase the variety of foods eaten and exposure to anxiety-provoking or feared foods, as well as weight restoration as needed.

\*\*These statistics have been taken from [www.nationaleatingdisorder.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorder.org)

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