

> Eating disorders are dangerous conditions. Many people believe they are all about food, weight and image; however, exercise bulimia is an eating-related disorder that is an equally destructive and potentially fatal obsession with weight loss via physical exertion.

# EXERCISE BULIMIA - ARE YOU AT RISK?

Developing and sticking to a dynamic and regular exercise routine is critical to achieve optimum health; but there is such a thing as taking it too far.

## EATING DISORDERS: SOME FACTS

- + An eating disorder is a mental illness where thoughts about dieting, body shape and weight become the focus of one's life.
- + They can affect anyone; males, females, children as young as four, to women aged in their sixties or older.
- + Anorexia is the third most chronic illness found in girls and young women.
- + The incidence of bulimia is 1 in 100.
- + People who suffer from an eating disorder are 37 times at risk to suicide
- + Anorexia is the most fatal of all psychiatric conditions, with one in 20 sufferers dying within a 20 year period.

**1 IN 4**

**people know someone with an eating disorder**





There is a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding eating disorders. The most widely recognised ones are anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating disorder.

**UNLIKE THE MORE** commonly recognised eating disorders, many sufferers of exercise bulimia do not present an emaciated physique, so there is often no association with an eating disorder; this should, however, not indicate a lack of severity.

It is difficult to know precisely how many are affected by this disorder, but the incidence appears to be growing.

The Eating Disorders Foundation Inc. (EDF) offers educational, telephone and online support to sufferers, their loved ones and also to health professionals in NSW who need help to try to understand the intricacies of the illnesses.

EDF is often contacted by health professionals within the fitness industry who are at a loss about how to best help clients who are really underweight or behaving in extreme ways around diet and exercise.

Ashleigh Synnott, who works as a telephone support and information person at EDF says, 'The best thing we can do is to recommend that the trainer encourage the sufferer to make contact with an eating disorders foundation in their state so that they can get some support and information on where they can go get professional help.'

Amanda Jordan, the CEO of EDF says it is important to recognise that this disorder is not so much about being committed to fitness and wellbeing, but an obsession that is very destructive both psychologically and physically.

'There is a great deal of shame surrounding the illness for sufferers,' she explains. 'The most worrying thing about exercise bulimia, however, is that it is likely to go undetected.'

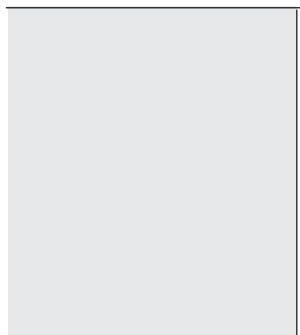
### WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If you or someone you know suffers from exercise bulimia or disordered eating, contact the following organisations for advice or support:

- > Eating Disorders Foundation (NSW).  
Ph: 02 9412 4499 or visit [www.edf.org.au](http://www.edf.org.au)
- > Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria.  
Ph: 03 9885 0318 or visit [www.eatingdisorders.org.au](http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au)
- > Eating Disorders Association (Qld).  
Ph: 07 3891 3660 or visit [www.eda.org.au](http://www.eda.org.au)

### THE SIGNS TO LOOK FOR WHICH COULD INDICATE EXERCISE BULIMIA INCLUDE:

- + Exercise sessions last for three to six hours per day. Any deviation in exercise routine provokes extreme feelings of anxiety.
- + Exercise is undertaken, even during injury or illness.
- + There appear to be strict 'rules' around exercise regimes, and these take precedence over other day-to-day activities.



### JO KILDEA

Jo graduated from university with Honours and has been volunteering at the Eating Disorders Foundation (NSW) since 2002. Here she's worked in numerous roles including fundraising, media liaison, writing and public speaking. Jo is an active advocate for greater public awareness and better treatment facilities for sufferers.