

Health, Beauty & Fitness

Eating disorders are common, chronic conditions among females

In this month's Osler Health Connection we will examine eating disorders — what they are, who is at risk and how to find help.

According to the National Eating Disorders Information Centre it is estimated that more than 142,000 women between the ages 14 to 24 in Canada have some form of eating disorder and may require services of an eating disorder clinic such as the one William Osler Health Centre opened this year.

"Eating disorders are characterized by severely disordered eating and weight loss behaviours," explained Sylvia Kerr, dietitian with William Osler Health Centre's new Eating Disorders Clinic.

Anorexia Nervosa (AN) is one type of eating disorder. Its main features include: being severely underweight due to excessive dieting, having an intense fear of gaining weight, and having a distorted view of one's body size. Bulimia Nervosa (BN) is another eating disorder defined by repeated episodes of uncontrollable binge eating, followed by unhealthy weight loss behaviours (e.g. induced vomiting, laxative abuse, excessive exercise).

"While individuals with AN are underweight, those with BN are often in the normal to overweight range. One common feature shared by both groups is the over-emphasis placed on body size and shape in evaluating self-worth," said Kerr.

Eating disorders are often associated with depressed



Eating disorders are common and chronic conditions among adolescent and adult females. Although more common in females, they also occur in males. Eating disorders have been found to affect individuals of all ethnic groups and economic levels.

William Osler Health Centre played a key advocacy role in bringing the eating disorders program to the community and in co-ordinating the key players.

"We are a partner in the Central West Eating Disorders Program that covers the Regions of Peel, Halton, Dufferin, Waterloo, and Wellington," said Arbic. "Similar programs exist now throughout these areas to provide consistency, support and accessibility in the treatment of eating disorders."

The Eating Disorders Clinic provides outpatient assessment and treatment for children, adolescents, and adults with mild to moderate eating disorders. A physician referral is required to access the services of the clinic. Services are provided by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals

mood, irritability, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and anxiety, according to Christine Arbic, a social worker with the clinic.

including a: psychologist, psychiatrist, dietitian, and social worker. The new clinic serves residents in North Peel (Brampton and Caledon) and Halton Hills, as well as children and adolescents in Dufferin County. Residents of Etobicoke can contact National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC) at 1-866-NEDIC-20 (1-866-633-4220) or 416-340-4156 in Toronto or on the Internet at www.nedic.ca.

Eating disorders are serious medical and mental health problems. Without appropriate treatment, they can lead to significant emotional difficulties, medical complications, and even death. If you suspect that you or someone you know has some form of eating disorder, seek medical attention by making an appointment with your physician. Help is only a phone call away.

For more information please contact: William Osler Health Centre Eating Disorders Clinic, 905-453-1160.

William Osler Health Centre has hospital campuses in Etobicoke, Brampton and Georgetown. The views expressed in this month's column are that of Alemka Mahalec, manager for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; Sylvia Kerr, dietitian and Christine Arbic, social worker with the Eating Disorders Clinic at William Osler Health Centre. The statements made in this column are for general information only, please consult your physician for personal medical advice. If you have comments on this column, please call WOHC community contact line at (905) 451-1710, ext. 2505 or e-mail: oslerconnection@oslerhc.org.

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