

New press release about results of eating disorders research....

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill issued the following news release:

Three Out of Four American Women Have Disordered Eating

Sixty-five percent of American women between the ages of 25 and 45 report having disordered eating behaviors, according to the results of a new survey by SELF Magazine in partnership with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

An additional 10 percent of women report symptoms consistent with eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder, meaning that a total of 75 percent of all American women endorse some unhealthy thoughts, feelings or behaviors related to food or their bodies.

"Our survey found that these behaviors cut across racial and ethnic lines and are not limited to any one group," said Cynthia R. Bulik, Ph.D., William and Jeanne Jordan Distinguished Professor of Eating Disorders in the UNC School of Medicine's department of psychiatry and director of the UNC Eating Disorders Program. "Women who identified their ethnic backgrounds as Hispanic or Latina, white, black or African American and Asian were all represented among the women who reported unhealthy eating behaviors."

"What we found most surprising was the unexpectedly high number of women who engage in unhealthy purging activities," said Bulik, who is also a nutrition professor in the School of Public Health. "More than 31 percent of women in the survey reported that in an attempt to lose weight they had induced vomiting or had taken laxatives, diuretics or diet pills at some point in their life. Among these women, more than 50 percent engaged in purging activities at least a few times a week and many did so every day."

Lucy Danziger, the editor-in-chief of SELF Magazine said: "SELF's investigation will help our 5.8 million readers determine whether their eating habits could be considered disordered, and the survey results show that more women than expected will identify with various disordered eating behaviors," said "Recognizing what's normal and what's dangerous is the first step all women can take in developing a more positive body image and a healthier approach to food."

Although the type of disordered eating behaviors the survey uncovered don't necessarily have potentially lethal consequences like anorexia or bulimia nervosa, women report they

are associated with emotional and physical distress. And despite the stereotype that eating issues affect mostly young women, the survey found that those in their 30s and 40s report disordered eating at virtually the same rates. Findings show that:

- 75 percent of women report disordered eating behaviors or symptoms consistent with eating disorders; so three out of four have an unhealthy relationship with food or their bodies
- 67 percent of women (excluding those with actual eating disorders) are trying to lose weight
- 53 percent of dieters are already at a healthy weight and are still trying to lose weight
- 39 percent of women say concerns about what they eat or weigh interfere with their happiness
- 37 percent regularly skip meals to try to lose weight
- 27 percent would be "extremely upset" if they gained just five pounds
- 26 percent cut out entire food groups
- 16 percent have dieted on 1,000 calories a day or fewer
- 13 percent smoke to lose weight
- 12 percent often eat when they're not hungry; 49 percent sometimes do

Eating habits that women think are normal - such as banishing carbohydrates, skipping meals and in some cases extreme dieting – may actually be symptoms of disordered eating.

The online survey garnered responses from 4,023 women who answered detailed questions about their eating habits. Results and analysis appear in SELF's May 2008 issue, on newsstands from today (April 22) through May 19. SELF and UNC's goal was to discover the unfiltered reality of the eating habits of American women, and ultimately, to help women develop less obsessive, more accepting attitudes toward their bodies and a healthier relationship with food, Danziger said.

SELF's report includes tips to help all women even out their behavior by adopting a moderate approach to eating. Tips for staying healthy include: separating mood from food; eliminating extreme thinking; eating breakfast; and finding realistic body role models.

Bulik and study co-author Lauren Reba-Harrelson, a third year clinical psychology graduate student in UNC's College of Arts and Sciences, will give a presentation about the survey and their collaboration with SELF on May 17 at the Academy for Eating Disorders' 2008 International Conference on Eating Disorders in Seattle.

Women can take a version of the survey at <http://www.self.com> to see how they compare with other readers' answers and share their thoughts in the Hot Topics section of the magazine's Web site.