Men and Women with Eating Disorders: Similarities and Differences

Many experiences are common to people with an eating disorder, regardless of their sex or identified gender. These include:

- Preoccupation with food, eating, and dieting
- Concerns about shape and weight
- Potential for serious medical complications
- Disruption to hormonal functioning
- Other concurrent mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety
- Poor self-esteem and/or low self-compassion

Some differences may be seen in males with eating disorders:

- Amongst those with eating disorders, men tend to have higher rates of past obesity than women
- The average age of onset for eating disorders tends to be later in men than in women
- While women’s menstruation may be disrupted due to disordered eating, in men, lowered hormone levels results in decreased sexual desire or disrupted sexual functioning (see our handout Eating Disorders and Hormones)
- Weight control methods sometimes (but not always!) differ between men and women. For example, men may be more likely to try to control their weight with exercise, whilst women may be more likely to engage in dietary restriction
- For some men, heightened concerns about muscularity may become part of the eating disorder. This may involve a misperception of either their own or others’ muscularity and a preoccupation with becoming more muscular and ‘bulking up’ rather than pursuing weight loss or a smaller frame

Seeking Treatment

If you are a male who is struggling with concerns about food, eating, body weight and shape (including thinness or muscularity), it is important that you seek professional advice and treatment. Talking to your GP is often a good place to start.

You may like to visit The National Association for Males with Eating Disorders (N.A.M.E.D.) website for more information: http://namedinc.org