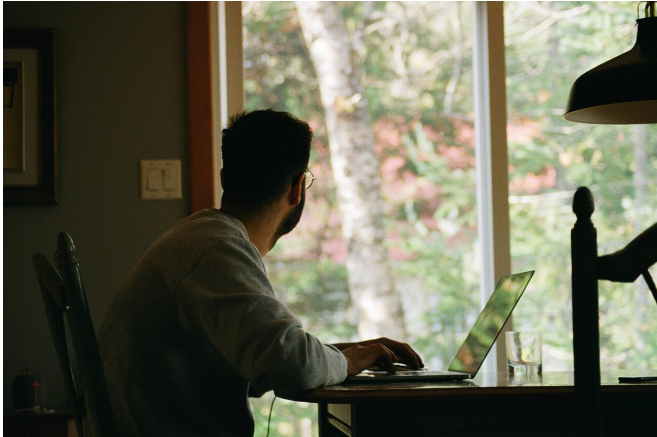


Lockdowns linked to rise in eating disorder symptoms

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New research indicates that lockdowns to help tackle the spread of COVID-19 could be linked to an increase in symptoms associated with eating disorders.

The [longitudinal study](#), carried out by academics from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in Cambridge, England, and published in the journal *Psychiatry Research*, examined the [behavior](#) and attitudes of 319 health club members during the summer of 2020.

The researchers followed up initial research into addictive or unhealthy behaviors, conducted in 2019, to investigate the effects of the first COVID-19 restrictions introduced in the spring of 2020.

Participants, with an average age of 37, completed the eating attitudes test, called EAT-26, which involved answering questions related to statements such as 'I am terrified about being overweight', 'I have the impulse to vomit after meals', and 'I feel extremely guilty after eating'.

The researchers found that average EAT-26 scores had significantly increased in 2020, post-lockdown, compared to 2019, suggesting higher levels of morbid eating behaviors such as anorexia and bulimia.

However, at the same time the study found a reduction in exercise addiction symptoms post-lockdown, while levels of individual exercise increased from 6.5 hours per week in 2019 to 7.5 hours per week post-lockdown in 2020.

Mike Trott, a Ph.D. researcher at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) who led the study, said: "We can't say for certain that COVID-19 is responsible for this increase in behavior associated with eating disorders. However, we do know that people often use food as a coping mechanism for stress, and clearly many people have been impacted by stressful events and significant changes over the last 12 months.

"If future lockdowns or periods of enforced quarantine are required, practitioners working with people with suspected eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia, should monitor these behaviors closely.

"Encouragingly, we also found that symptoms of exercise addiction fell following the first lockdown, but average exercise rates increased by an hour a week compared to 2019. It could be that the participants in our study were eager to restart their exercise routines post-lockdown and make up for time lost by exercising more. Regardless of motives, there are many physical and mental health benefits to regular [exercise](#), so this is a positive finding."

More information: Mike Trott et al, Changes in body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorder, and exercise addiction symptomology during the COVID-19 pandemic: A longitudinal study of 319 health club users, *Psychiatry Research* (2021).

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