



Orthorexia: When Healthy Becomes an Obsession

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RENO, NV - Eating too healthy is probably something you never realized could be a problem. In fact, it's something that is regularly encouraged. But Katie Stout, [Executive](#) Director for the Center for Hope of the Sierra, a local treatment facility for people suffering from eating disorders, says they've seen a rise in people who are taking healthy eating to the extreme.

"It usually starts out very innocently, just wanting to eat a little more [healthy](#) and turns into a real obsession where they're restricting to just a few food they are allowed and their calorie intake is very low," Stout said.

It's called orthorexia.

"Ortho in Greek means right or correct," Stout said. "So it's an obsession with the right kinds of foods."

It's similar to anorexia. In fact, since orthorexia is not an official eating disorder, Stout says orthorexics will be diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. But, she says, orthorexia goes beyond the desire to be skinny.

"Someone with orthorexia is really concerned with the type of food they are eating, where it comes from, how it's grown," Stout said. "Really an obsession with eating healthy and usually over exercising."

Stout says there's a different mentality with people suffering from orthorexia versus anorexics. She says when faced with a choice, anorexics would rather chose a vegetable over a candy bar.

"Someone with orthorexia would rather choose the vegetable also," she said. "But is really going to be worried about how the vegetable is grown, where it's from, is it organic? Really obsessed about what type of food they eat. That's the difference."

Often orthorexics will end up with only 3-5 food choices they will allow themselves to eat.

Stout says orthorexia has been around for some time, but has become more common due to recent diet fads aimed at creating a [healthier](#) lifestyle. Another concern Stout says, is often times orthorexics are praised for their eating habits, which can propel them even further down the unhealthy lifestyle.

"Often someone with orthorexia will get positive reinforcement constantly from people saying 'you have so much self-control' 'I wish I could eat that way' and they are dropping weight and so a lot of positive reinforcement when it can really be a life-threatening thing," she said.

"At that point you're not even eating healthy anymore. You are at a very low body weight, you muscles are atrophying, you can have fatigue, you can't concentrate anymore. You're body is going through the stage of malnutrition."

Stout says not everyone who eats healthy should be labeled orthorexic. She says signs to look out for are:

Too "pure" for your own good?

Worried that your desire to eat clean has spiraled out of control? If you identify with two or more of the following traits, you may want to seek out a nutritionist or counselor, according to Dunn.

- Being preoccupied about how eating impure or unhealthy foods will affect your physical or emotional [health](#).
- Rigidly avoiding any food you deem to be "unhealthy," such as those containing fat, preservatives, additives or animal [products](#).
- Feeling guilty if you eat foods you believe to be "impure."
- Being intolerant of other's food beliefs.
- Spending an excessive proportion of your income on "pure" foods.