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On orthorexia nervosa: A review of the literature and proposed diagnostic criteria

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Highlights

- Healthful eating may become pathological, causing malnutrition or impairment.
- The literature in this area is dominated by European prevalence studies.
- Atypical variation in prevalence rates, 6 to 89%, due to flawed instrumentation.
- Orthorexia nervosa is likely distinct from Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder.
- Proposed diagnostic criteria are given to advance further research in the

area.

Abstract

There has been a growing interest among clinicians and researchers about a condition where people restrict their diet based not on quantity of food they consume, but based on its quality. Bratman (1997) coined the term “orthorexia nervosa” to describe people whose extreme diets “intended for health reasons” are in fact leading to malnutrition and/or impairment of daily functioning. There has also recently been intense media interest in people whose highly restrictive “healthy” diet leads to disordered eating. Despite this condition being first described in the U.S., and receiving recent media interest here, orthorexia has largely gone unnoticed in the North American literature. This review article details the literature of orthorexia nervosa, describing its emergence as a condition first described by a physician in a yoga magazine, to its being discussed in the scientific literature. It also reviews prevalence studies and discusses marked shortcomings in the literature. Finally, diagnostic criteria are proposed, as are future directions for research.



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Keywords

Orthorexia nervosa; Eating disorders; Unhealthy eating

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