

Eating Disorder Toolkit | *Article*

# How Eating Disorders Affect our Brain

Eating disorders have long been seen as culturally driven phenomena, the result of external factors such as societal pressures, parental influences and traumatic events. Today, however, emerging research suggests that the roots of eating disorders extend beyond cultural dynamics into the realm of neurobiology. While external factors undeniably play a role, understanding the origins of eating disorders is the key to developing more effective prevention and treatment strategies.

Traditionally, the medical community has attributed eating disorders to external factors such as cultural ideals and societal expectations. The pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, family attitudes towards weight and diet, and exposure to highly stressful events are often cited as potential triggers for disordered eating habits. While these factors contribute to the development of eating disorders, the focus on external influences has overshadowed the complex interaction of genetic, biological and environmental factors.

Recent advancements in neuroscience have shed light on the intricate workings of the brain in individuals with eating disorders. Research using neuroimaging techniques has revealed structural and functional abnormalities in specific brain regions associated with appetite regulation, reward processing and emotional control.

## The Implications for Treatment and Prevention

Understanding the brain's roots in eating disorders has profound implications for treatment and prevention strategies. Educational programs that promote a holistic understanding of eating disorders, emphasizing the interaction between genetics, neurobiology, and environment, can contribute to a more nuanced and effective approach to prevention.

**#PracticeNourishment #FeedingHope**

If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, you can find additional resources through the **National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)** or call the **National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders (ANAD)** Helpline at 888-375-7767.



40%–60% of the likelihood of developing an eating disorder is due to genetic factors.

Source: UNC Health