

## Breaking the Cycle: Preventive Measures against Adolescent Eating Disorders

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### DESCRIPTION

The journey of food and eating habits begins early in life, often shaped during the formative years of childhood. Recent research has illustrate on an intriguing correlation between food-focused toddlers and the increased likelihood of developing eating disorders in adolescence. Understanding this connection is important for parents, caregivers, and healthcare professionals to intervene early and promote healthy relationships with food [1]. This article delves into the factors contributing to this phenomenon and offers insights into preventive measures.

### Signs of food fixation in toddlers

**Exploring food-focused behavior in toddlers:** Toddlers are naturally curious beings, exploring the world around them, including various tastes and textures of food. However, some toddlers exhibit heightened interest or fixation on food, displaying behaviors such as constant requests for snacks, tantrums around mealtime, or an obsession with certain types of food. While occasional preferences are normal, an excessive focus on food could signal underlying issues.

**Contributing factors:** Several factors contribute to the development of food-focused behavior in toddlers, including genetic predispositions, environmental influences, and parental feeding practices. Genetics play a role in determining a child's temperament and susceptibility to certain behaviors, including food fixation. Additionally, environmental factors such as family dynamics, cultural norms, and media influence can shape a child's perception of food.

Parental feeding practices also play a significant role in shaping a child's relationship with food. Pressuring children to eat certain foods or using food as a reward can inadvertently reinforce food-focused behaviors [2]. Moreover, parental modeling of unhealthy eating habits or attitudes towards body image can influence a child's perception of food and eating.

**The transition to adolescence:** As toddlers grow into adolescence, their food-focused behavior may either diminish or intensify, depending on various factors. Adolescence is a critical period characterized by physical, emotional, and social changes, making individuals more susceptible to external influences. For

some, food becomes a coping mechanism for dealing with stress, emotions, or peer pressure, leading to disordered eating patterns.

**Research findings:** Studies have revealed a correlation between food-focused behavior in toddlers and an increased risk of developing eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge-eating disorder, during adolescence. A longitudinal study conducted by (International Institute of School and Psychology) followed a cohort of children from infancy to adolescence and found that toddlers exhibiting food fixation were more likely to develop disordered eating behaviors later in life.

**The role of psychological factors:** Psychological factors, including low self-esteem, poor body image, and perfectionism, often underlie the development of eating disorders. Food-focused toddlers may internalize societal norms and expectations regarding body image, leading to distorted perceptions of food and weight. Moreover, childhood experiences, such as trauma or neglect, can contribute to maladaptive coping mechanisms, including disordered eating.

**Preventive measures:** Early intervention is important in preventing the progression of food-focused behavior into full-blown eating disorders. Parents and caregivers play a pivotal role in promoting healthy eating habits and a positive body image from an early age. Encouraging a balanced diet, fostering a supportive mealtime environment, and modeling healthy behaviors can mitigate the risk of developing disordered eating patterns.

Education and awareness also play a vital role in addressing this issue [3]. Healthcare professionals should educate parents and caregivers about the signs of food-focused behavior and provide guidance on fostering a healthy relationship with food. Additionally, schools can incorporate nutrition education and body positivity into their curriculum to promote healthy eating habits and body image among children and adolescents.

Furthermore, addressing societal pressures and stereotypes surrounding food and body image is essential in preventing eating disorders. Media literacy programs can teach adolescents to critically evaluate media messages and challenge unrealistic beauty standards. Creating inclusive environments that show

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**Received:** 01-Feb-2024, Manuscript No. IJSCP-24-29933; **Editor assigned:** 05-Feb-2024, Pre QC No. IJSCP-24-29933 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 19-Feb-2024, QC No. IJSCP-24-29933; **Revised:** 26-Feb-2024, Manuscript No. IJSCP-24-29933 (R); **Published:** 04-Mar-2024, DOI: 10.35248/2469-9837.24.11.345.

**Citation:** Roman L (2024) Breaking the Cycle: Preventive Measures against Adolescent Eating Disorders. Int J Sch Cogn Psycho.11:345.

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diversity in body shapes and sizes can also help reduce the stigma associated with food and weight [4].

## CONCLUSION

The correlation between food-focused toddlers and the increased risk of eating disorders in adolescence underscores the importance of early intervention and preventive measures. By addressing the underlying factors contributing to food fixation and promoting healthy eating habits from an early age, we can empower children and adolescents to develop a positive relationship with food and their bodies. Through collaborative efforts from parents, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and educators, we can create a future where individuals are free from the grips of eating disorders and embrace nourishment in all its forms.

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