

Anorexia is widely believed to be an illness among teenage girls and women but there is a lot more to it. What about boys and men suffering from Anorexia? And have you ever heard of websites which promote Anorexia rather as a chosen lifestyle rather than a form of illness?

These so called pro-Anorexia websites do not see Anorexia as something health damaging that has to be treated but as something that is someone's own choice and therefore should be respected. Here you can find tips on how to lose weight, 'thinspiration' pictures and chat rooms to meet like-minded people. The NHS and other medical institutions have classified these websites as dangerous and are working on ways to counteract them. It is feared that the websites have a seriously damaging impact on people who suffer from Anorexia or Bulimia.

Sam Thomas has previously suffered with bulimia and set up the website www.mengetedstoo.co.uk especially for male sufferers.

Sam explained: "My website targets men who are affected by eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder) and associated exercise disorders ('bigorexia' and compulsive exercise.) The site aims to provide essential information and advice about eating disorders including the definitions, symptoms and treatments available. There are also personal stories and a message board so men can share their experiences and offer peer support."

Sam has had numerous emails from men all over the country and abroad sharing their experiences and support for the site. Since January there have been more than 600 hits each month.

Sam believes male eating disorders are seemingly unrecognised due to men hiding feelings and issues they may be facing. Services tend to cater more for



women because they talk more about their needs. I also think the press/media has a lot to do with it. Rarely do we ever hear of a man with an eating disorder. Eating disorders can develop purely from psychological factors (e.g. underperforming at school/uni/ work or failing relationships) but the press makes out it's all about weight, which it's not! Men can experience a number of contributing factors including identity and sexuality issues; body image; sports – being a certain weight/size (e.g. rugby players and jockeys.)

"I believe men of all ages, backgrounds and sexualities can be susceptible to eating disorders. However this is some evidence that suggests that younger men are more at risk. Generally, eating disorders are usually caused by feeling pressured in some way."

Sam says he has done a lot of work to raise awareness in men and most of the press/media has been keen to help him in this because the issue is virtually unheard of and it is clearly becoming even more significant. I found the gay press has been extremely supportive,

though the generic men's health press hasn't been so great. I think they could help loads in making men more aware of the issues and helping those affected get the support they need.

Sam's story can be found on:

www.mengetedstoo.co.uk

Sam's petition to 10 Downing Street to get more help for men with eating disorders is at:

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/men-eds>

