Orthorexia

Choosing nutrient-dense foods and being mindful of eating behaviors can help to promote health, however, in some cases this mentality could become unhealthy. Orthorexia Nervosa is an obsession with healthy eating and anxiety around food with restrictive eating in ways which are disordered but do not qualify for an anorexia nervosa (AN) diagnosis.¹

Know the Warning Signs
According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), the following may be signs and symptoms of orthorexia:²

- Elimination of entire food groups in favor of eating only select foods deemed ‘healthy’, ‘clean’, ‘natural’, or ‘pure’
- Compulsive checking of ingredient lists and nutrition labels
- Spending hours each day planning and thinking about foods to be served or eaten later
- Showing high levels of distress when so-called safe foods are not available
- Obsessively following social media accounts which promote healthy eating
- Frequently participating in cleanses, fasts, or diets
- Self-worth dependent upon adherence to food rules and healthy eating behaviors³

Effects of Orthorexia
Orthorexia can lead to physical and psychological health problems. As with other eating disorders, the restriction of certain major food groups may lead to deficiencies in nutrient intake and eventually malnutrition.⁴

Who is Affected?
Orthorexia affects people from all backgrounds and body sizes, but is especially prevalent in the following populations:¹³⁴

- Exercise science, nursing, nutrition, and medical students
- Registered dietitians and nutritionists
- Yoga instructors

While counting yourself as part of one or more of these groups does not automatically mean you are susceptible to developing orthorexia, it might be worth keeping in mind that you may be at increased risk compared to the general population.

Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with Food

- **Social Media.** Be mindful of the social media accounts you follow. One study found that increased time spent on ‘healthy eating’ Instagram accounts was linked to increased orthorexia symptoms.¹
- **Intuitive Eating.** Practice intuitive eating and listening to your body’s hunger and fullness cues rather than external sources.
- **Food Flexibility.** Practice flexibility in your thoughts surrounding what is healthy and what is not. Remember, all foods can fit as part of a healthy diet.
- **Advice.** Consider where you get your nutrition advice. Work with a credentialed professional, like a registered dietitian nutritionist, to develop safe and healthy meal and snack ideas which fit your personal needs.
- **Support.** Seek help from a professional such as a therapist and dietitian if you think you may be experiencing symptoms of orthorexia.
  + National Eating Disorders Association: 1-800-931-2237
  + Counseling and Consultation Service: 614-292-5766
  + Student Wellness Center’s Nutrition Coaching: 614-292-4527

References
1. Turner PG, Lefevre CE. Instagram use is linked to increased symptoms of orthorexia nervosa. Eat Weight Disord EWD. 2017;22(2):277-284. doi:10.1007/s40519-017-0364-2
2. Orthorexia: National Eating Disorders Association (link to site)
3. Understanding Orthorexia (link to site)

Student Life Student Wellness Center | B130 RPAC | 337 Annie & John Glenn Ave. | 614-292-4527 | swc.osu.edu