

## **Expert discusses eating disorders and college students**

Because 86 percent of persons with eating disorders report the onset of the illness by the age of 20, the college years are often a time when students first show signs of this dangerous disease. It is also a time when they can reach out for support and help.

To address this growing campus problem, Dr. Laura A. Eickman, a specialist in eating disorders, will present “Eating Disorders in the College Population,” from 1-3 p.m. on Thursday, March 17, in the Overman Student Center at Pittsburg State University. The program is free and is open to PSU students and faculty as well as the general community. Eickman’s visit is sponsored by the Student Prevention & Wellness Office and by the Gorillas In Your Midst peer health education group.

Eickman has had a special interest in the field of eating disorders since her own undergraduate years. She has coordinated campuswide eating disorders education and prevention efforts, developed an eating disorders peer education program for college students, and has spoken to a variety of audiences on health and wellness topics. In addition to education and prevention activities, Eickman also provides individual and group therapy for individuals with eating and body image issues.

Eickman received her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Nebraska and both her master of science degree and her doctorate from Baylor University. She is currently completing a post-doctoral residency at the Kansas City Veterans Administration Medical Center.

According to the Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders, as many as 24 million Americans suffer from one of three eating disorders. Often considered a “woman’s disease,” eating disorders are being diagnosed in a growing number of men. Men, however, are less likely than women to get treatment for their illness, according to the American Psychological Association.

For both women and men, psychologists agree, eating disorders have their roots in negative body images. According to the “International Journal of Eating Disorders,” 91 percent of women surveyed on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting. The “International Journal of Eating Disorders” reports that 35

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percent of so-called “normal” dieters progress to pathological dieting. Of those, 20-25 percent progress to partial or full-syndrome eating disorders.

Sociologists say that modern mass media perpetuate unrealistic ideal body types. While the ideal body type portrayed in advertising is possessed naturally by only 5 percent of American females, one study found that 47 percent of 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade girls reported wanting to lose weight because of magazine pictures. Another indicated that as many as 42 percent of 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade girls want to be thinner and 81 percent of 10-year-olds said they were afraid of being fat.

**For more information, please contact J.T. Knoll, coordinator of prevention and wellness, at 620-235-4062, <jknoll@pittstate.edu>.**

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