

Eating disorders in children (pp. 357-384)

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It is generally accepted that eating disorders are already present in childhood, but very few research investigations have been conducted in this age. The current status of diagnosis, prevalence, assessment and etiology of eating disorders in childhood is reviewed. The diagnostic criteria for adults have been shown to be not very appropriate for that developmental stage. The definition, classification and diagnosis of eating disorders should be done on the basis of specific diagnostic criteria for childhood. The prevalence shows a high variability depending on several factors as the comprehensive or narrow use of the diagnostic criteria, among others. The troubled eating attitudes and behaviors as also partial syndromes are frequent in this period of age, but complete syndromes are scarce. There are very few assessment instruments developed specifically for childhood. Most of them are adaptations of those used with adults, showing important deficits in providing cut-off scores, sensibility, specificity and predictive power. Few research has been conducted on risk factors. The evidence points out to the presence of several early attitudes and eating behaviors that could be influencing the development of a later eating disorder.