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Canadian University Press

Soon it will be spring, the season when young men's hearts turn to love and young women's thoughts turn to dieting.

It's the time of year when advertisers begin marketing summer clothes by plastering bus terminals magazine pages and newspapers with pictures of thin, attractive women. Along with fashionable clothes, they are also selling fashionable shapes. This season's preferred body is tall and thin.

Many women dream this will be the year they lose enough weight to wear a bikini or look good in the latest designer jeans, and so the diet craze on Canadian campuses begins.

While dieting to reach a certain body size isn't exactly a new phenomenon, a sharp increase in the number of women suffering from dieting-related diseases means more doctors are questioning our attitudes towards body size and weight loss.

According to Dr. Hedy Fry, chair of the British Columbia Medical Association's nutrition committee, as many as four to 20 per cent of female university students have bulimia, and as many as 25 per cent show symptoms of anorexia nervosa or bulimia. Both illnesses are characterized by an obsession with weight, food and thinness. Although some men suffer from eating disorders, more than 90 per cent of anorexics and bulimics are women.

In British Columbia, Fry is trying to find out just how widespread is the incidence of eating disorders. She's conducting a survey to see how many people suffer from bulimia or anorexia nervosa to some degree. Fry believes that while the number of women who end up in hospital may not be that high, there are lots of people who have some symptoms associated with the disorders.

"It's important to reach people before they get to hospital. The ones who do it for a long time without detection suffer, guilt, depression and low self-esteem leading to psychological damage," she says. "Physicians and nurses aren't recognizing the problem early enough. They see only the very sick ones in urgent need of treatment."

While psychologists suspect the twin eating disorders have similar causes there are important differences between anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Anorexia nervosa usually begins with a desire to lose weight

through dieting and exercise. After an initial weight loss, dieting then becomes an obsession and its victims consider themselves too fat, no matter how much weight they lose. At some point, anorexics simply stop eating; some starve themselves to death.

Bulimia is less understood than anorexia. It is also more difficult to detect because it may not involve the same drastic weight loss. Bulimics diet too, but they also practice the binge and purge syndrome. Bulimics often take in a large quantity of food and then purge it by making themselves vomit. Some bulimics use commercial laxatives or diuretics to rid their bodies of the calories. Others exercise for three or more hours a day.

Of the two diseases, anorexia nervosa is far easier to detect. Its victims show visible symptoms in a relatively short period of time. They lose up to 30 per cent of their body weight, menstruation ceases and in the later stages a fine growth of hair covers their body. The disease must be treated or they will die.

Signs of bulimia are not as obvious. A concern about weight and frequent exercising may seem normal and bulimics often lie or hide their vomiting in shame. Bulimic patterns can continue for years. It is not harmless, though. High acidity in vomit erodes teeth and maintaining an artificially low weight is not healthy.

Here's one of those oval majestic figures, such as poets and mythologists attribute to Juno ... Her hips were large and wide, whilst her buttocks swelling out behind into two hillocks of snowy-white flesh, firm and springy to the touch, gave token of the vivacity and liveliness with which their owner would enter into the delicious combats of love. Her thighs were of a largeness and fleshy plumpness seldom seen in a female ... She was, in fact, the very beau ideal of female beauty.
— From Victorian pornography, 1880

Lynn Andrews, a counsellor at Saint Mary's University in Halifax

Diseases of Spring:

started a discussion group for students with bulimia when she realized how widespread the problem was on her campus. The six week old group meets to discuss nutrition and eating habits. Andrews says she hopes it will help students discover healthy eating habits.

"A lot of these women are afraid to eat normal meals. They are afraid of food," says Andrews. She attributes the recent increase in cases of bulimia to the pressure in society for women to be thin, and the stress caused by the changing role of women in society.

"How many skinny people fit in the shower? None, they keep slipping down the drain."
— Garfield

Andrews says it all began with Twiggy, "the new skinny woman." Twiggy, the gaunt guru of the fashion industry in the 1960, was the first of the super skinny models who have since become the norm in the modelling business. At the same time, Playboy models began to get thinner. While the weight of the average Playboy centrefold has dropped significantly in the past twenty years, the size of the average North American woman has increased. Andrews says this disparity between the fantasy and the reality has caused a great deal of stress.

Praised be to Allah who made me stout and stuffed cushions in my every nook and corner; neither did He neglect to lard my skin with fat that is fragrant as the spicebusby ... Listen, skinny one, to what the poet says of the woman, fat like myself: "Look, as she rises, how she leaves sou-

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