



**TITLE: Admission and Treatment of Patients with Anorexia: Guidelines and Recommendations**

**DATE:** 02 November 2011

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the evidence-based guidelines regarding the hospital admission of patients with anorexia nervosa?
2. What are the evidence-based guidelines regarding the treatment of inpatients with anorexia nervosa?

**KEY MESSAGE**

Evidence-based guidelines provide physiological and psychological criteria regarding the hospital admission of patients with anorexia nervosa. Although the evidence found in the systematic reviews for treatment of anorexia nervosa was inconclusive, the evidence-based guidelines discuss various treatment strategies used in clinical practice.

**METHODS**

A limited literature search was conducted on key resources including PubMed, Ovid PsychINFO, The Cochrane Library (2011, Issue 10), University of York Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD) databases, Canadian and abbreviated list of major international health technology agencies, as well as a focused Internet search. Methodological filters were applied to limit retrieval to health technology assessments, systematic reviews, meta-analyses and guidelines. Where possible, retrieval was limited to the human population. The search was also limited to English language documents published between January 1, 2006 and October 18, 2011. Internet links were provided, where available.

The summary of findings was prepared from the abstracts of the relevant information. Please note that data contained in abstracts may not always be an accurate reflection of the data contained within the full article.

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## RESULTS

Rapid Response reports are organized so that the higher quality evidence is presented first. Therefore, health technology assessment reports, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses are presented first. These are followed by evidence-based guidelines.

One meta-analysis, two systematic reviews, and three evidence-based guidelines were identified pertaining to hospital admission or inpatient treatment of patients with anorexia nervosa. No health technology assessment reports were identified.

## OVERALL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

One meta-analysis<sup>1</sup> and two systematic reviews<sup>2,3</sup> sought to evaluate the literature pertaining to the effectiveness of treatments for anorexia nervosa (AN). A limitation of these studies is the uncertainty that the patients in the included studies were hospital inpatients. The meta-analysis<sup>1</sup> did not find strong evidence for a particular psychological therapy or procedure, or treatment setting, although inpatient treatment may produce faster weight gain than outpatient treatment. One systematic review<sup>2</sup> discussed the effectiveness and safety of various interventions for AN, including anxiolytic drugs, cyproheptadine, inpatient/outpatient treatment setting, estrogen treatment, psychotherapy, refeeding, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, and tricyclic antidepressants. One systematic review<sup>3</sup> concluded that the evidence for the treatment of AN is weak after evaluating studies including medications and behavioural therapy.

One guideline<sup>4</sup> recommends that adult patients who weigh less than approximately 85% of their individually estimated healthy weight would benefit from a highly structured program, including inpatient care. Inpatient care is also recommended (with substantial clinical confidence) for some patients who are above 85% of their individually estimated healthy weight but present with other factors. The guideline<sup>4</sup> recommends with substantial clinical confidence that hospitalization should occur prior to the onset of medical instability as manifested by abnormalities in vital signs, physical findings, or laboratory tests. The guideline also states that inpatient medical treatment for children and adolescents should be considered even if they do not meet the adult criteria for hospitalization. Treatments specific to AN discussed in this guideline include nutritional rehabilitation, psychosocial interventions, and medications and other somatic treatments.

One guideline<sup>5</sup> recommends that patients with AN whose disorder has not improved with outpatient treatment must be referred to day patient treatment or inpatient treatment. Inpatient management is indicated for patients who present a high risk of suicide or serious self-inflicted injuries and should be considered for patients with AN whose disorder is associated with high or moderate risk due to common disease or physical complications of AN. Recommendations pertaining to various treatment strategies for AN, including renutrition, nutritional counselling, family therapy, psychological therapy, and pharmacological treatment are provided.

One guideline<sup>6</sup> provides criteria for hospital admission for individuals with general eating disorders. General treatment and management strategies are discussed for inpatients with eating disorders. The guideline recommends that selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) may be beneficial in the non-acute stage of AN.

## REFERENCES SUMMARIZED

### Health technology assessments

No literature identified.

### Systematic reviews and meta-analyses

1. Hartmann A, Weber S, Herpertz S, Zeeck A, German Treatment Guideline Group for Anorexia Nervosa. Psychological treatment for anorexia nervosa: a meta-analysis of standardized mean change. *Psychother Psychosom.* 2011;80(4):216-26.  
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2. Lock JD, Fitzpatrick KK. Anorexia nervosa. *Clin Evid (Online)* [Internet]. 2009 Mar 10 [cited 2011 Oct 28]; 2009. pii: 1011. Available from:  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2907776>  
[PubMed: PM19445758](#)
3. Bulik CM, Berkman ND, Brownley KA, Sedway JA, Lohr KN. Anorexia nervosa treatment: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Int J Eat Disord.* 2007 May;40(4):310-20.  
[PubMed: PM17370290](#)

### Guidelines and recommendations

4. Yager Devlin M, Halmi K, Herzog D, Mitchell J, Powers P, et al. Practice guideline for the treatment of patients with eating disorders. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Internet]. Washington (DC): American Psychiatric Association (APA); 2006 Jul [cited 2011 Oct 18]. Available from:  
<http://psychiatryonline.org/content.aspx?bookid=28&sectionid=1671334#138660>
5. Working group of the Clinical Practice Guideline for Eating Disorders. Clinical practice guideline for eating disorders [Internet]. Madrid: Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs; 2009 Feb [cited 2011 Oct 18]. Available from:  
[http://www.guiasalud.es/GPC/GPC\\_440\\_Eat\\_Disorders\\_compl\\_en.pdf](http://www.guiasalud.es/GPC/GPC_440_Eat_Disorders_compl_en.pdf)  
See: Section 8.3 and 9
6. Eating disorder toolkit: a practice-based guide to the inpatient management of adolescents with eating disorders, with special reference to regional and rural areas [Internet]. North Sydney: New South Wales Health; 2008 [cited 2011 Oct 18]. Available from: [http://www.cedd.org.au/uploads/file\\_203.pdf](http://www.cedd.org.au/uploads/file_203.pdf)

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**APPENDIX – FURTHER INFORMATION:**

**Guidelines and recommendations**

*Methodology not specified*

7. Eating disorders: best practices in prevention and intervention [Internet]. Winnipeg: Mental Health and Spiritual Health Care, Manitoba Health; 2006 [cited 2011 Oct 18]. Available from: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/docs/bppi.pdf>

*Methodology not specified/ not specific to anorexia nervosa*

8. Adolescent Medicine Committee, Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS). Eating disorders in adolescents: principles of diagnosis and treatment. Paediatr Child Health [Internet]. 1998 [reaffirmed 2011 Jan; cited 2011 Oct 18];3(3):189-92. Available from: <http://www.cps.ca/english/statements/AM/am96-04.htm>

*Not specific to anorexia nervosa*

9. National Guideline Clearinghouse [Internet]. Rockville (MD): National Guideline Clearinghouse; c2009-. Eating disorders during pregnancy and postpartum; 2010 Sep 16 [cited 2011 Oct 18]. Summary available from: <http://www.guideline.gov/content.aspx?id=25631>  
See: Treatment Recommendations

**Review articles**

10. Herpertz-Dahlmann B, Salbach-Andrae H. Overview of treatment modalities in adolescent anorexia nervosa. Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am. 2009 Jan;18(1):131-45.  
[PubMed: PM19014862](#)
11. Sylvester CJ, Forman SF. Clinical practice guidelines for treating restrictive eating disorder patients during medical hospitalization. Curr Opin Pediatr. 2008 Aug;20(4):390-7.  
[PubMed: PM18622192](#)