



ORTHOREXIA

Document produced in the framework of the partnership between

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Introduction

With today's globalization, intensive farming, fishing and cultivation, more and more people want to return to a healthier, unprocessed and sustainable diet. The search of a perfectly healthy diet, entirely avoiding junkfood, industrial food and all processed foods (pesticides, additives, etc.) can lead to the development of food phobias. Today's consumer is torn between the desire for a balanced diet, and a lack of trust in the sanitary quality of the products found in supermarkets.

Thus, the obsession related to food quality characterizes a disorder called orthorexia.

Definition

Orthorexia can be defined as the obsession with eating healthy food. It expresses itself through an excessive concern for food quality and its effects on the body, to the expense of the quantities ingested, sensations about eating (see Newsletter #9) and even taste preferences.

People with orthorexia explain their behavior as the search of a form of purity (1). Orthorexia thus leads to the exclusive consumption of foods considered as "pure" (untreated, unprocessed) and the exclusion of foods considered as "impure" (processed, industrial, risky). The person with orthorexia categorizes food products mainly based on their own beliefs, founded on subjective arguments, and not scientific ones, for example : no gluten, only raw foods, exclude cow's milk, no additives, etc.

This classification leads to the total avoidance of many foods, even entire food families for some people.

ORTHO **REXIE**
Correct Appetite

When healthy eating becomes pathological

At what point does the quest for a balanced diet become pathological?

The scientific literature has established that a behavior can be considered as pathological from the moment it induces any significant distress or suffering, and has repercussions on other important areas of daily life (social, professional, hobbies, etc.) (2)

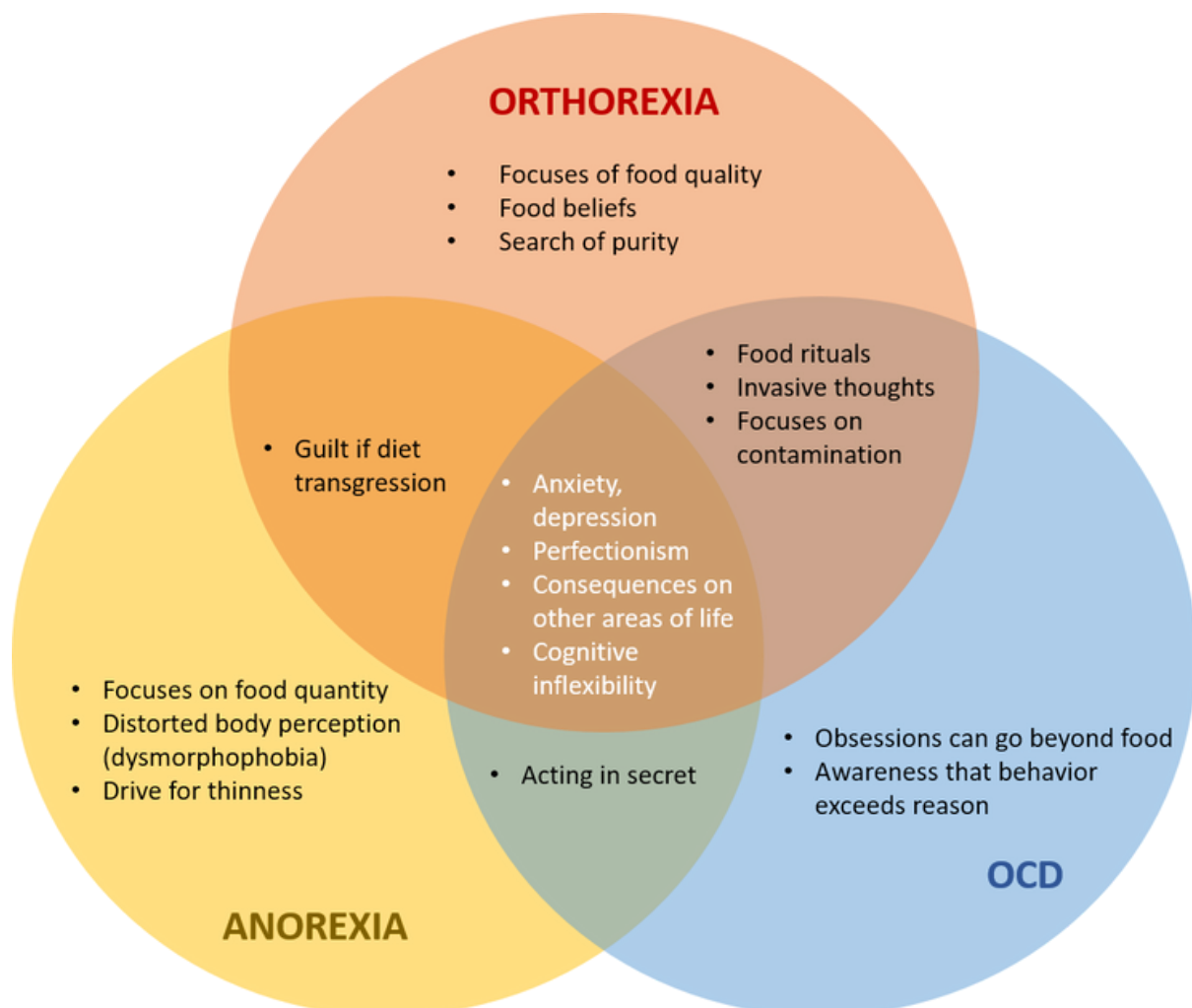
Balanced diet

- Intending to eat a balanced diet whenever possible
- Eating a balanced diet with respect to the health recommendations (see Newsletter #August) but being capable of flexibility
- Limiting the consumption of certain food products without excluding them completely
- Allowing oneself pleasure food and treats
- Allowing oneself holiday meals, restaurants, etc...
- Food is not the only priority
- The balanced diet is not at the expense of other areas of daily life
- Eating remains a pleasant moment
- Self-esteem is independent of the diet

Orthorexia

- Strict adherence to the self-imposed diet
- Lack of flexibility
- Preferring fasting rather than breaking diet
- Total exclusion of certain foods or food families considered "impure"
- Diet transgressions are a source of guilt, anxiety and even self-punishment (1,3)
- Food is the only priority
- Food is the main concern
- The diet imposed is to the expense of other areas of daily life
- Social isolation
- Total loss of the pleasure of eating
- Self-esteem is dependent on the diet
- Source of suffering

By definition, orthorexia cannot be qualified as an eating disorder (ED). However, it shares commonalities with anorexia nervosa, which is an ED. Furthermore, it has been shown that similarities also exist between orthorexia and obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD) (1) :



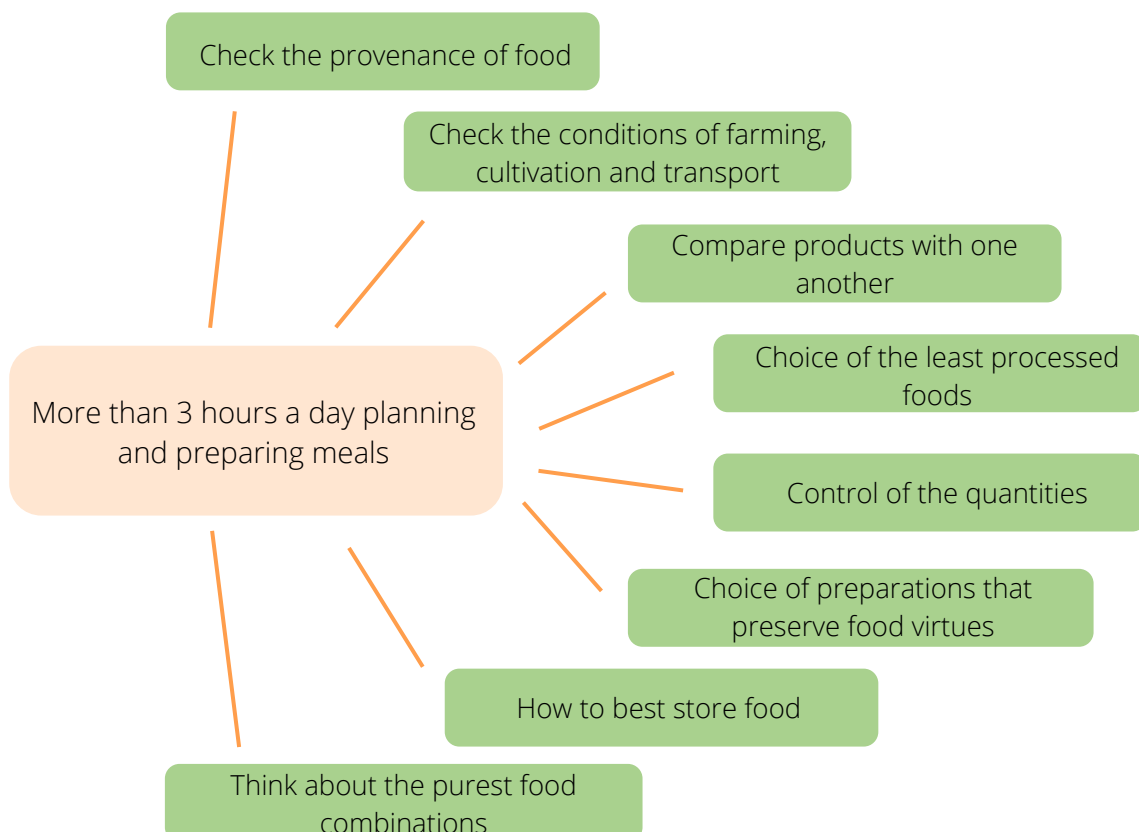
The onset of orthorexia

There are several factors that can contribute to the development of orthorexia: these risk factors can be internal (emanating from the individual) or external (emanating from the environment) (1, 3, 4, 5)

Internal risk factors	External risk factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perfectionism• Obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD)• Dietary habits• Eating disorders• Body dissatisfaction• Drive for thinness• Need for control• Anxious / depressive tendencies• Fear of illness and health problems - hypochondria• Knowledge in nutrition• Pursuing a weight loss diet (see newsletter #July)• High level sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sociocultural influences<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Organic, green, healthy food fashion◦ Healthy body fashion• Massive broadcasting of false information and food beliefs<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Social media◦ Press◦ Alarmist documentaries, books and articles• Lack of trust in the food industry<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Repeated scandals and controversies

How does orthorexia express itself?

In practical terms, orthorexia can result in many different behaviors depending on the individual. Here is a non-exhaustive list of the symptoms of orthorexia (1) :



Expressions of orthorexia:

Spend too much on food compared to income

Refusal to absorb "impure" products in any form (drinks, medicines, cosmetics, packaging, etc.)

Fear of eating food chosen and/or prepared by others

Stress generated by sharing a meal with others who do not have the same demands

Refusal to accept help from others in the kitchen for fear that rituals and practices will not be followed

Impact on mental health → increased anxiety and risk of depression

Physical dangers of orthorexia

Orthorexia, especially through the implementation of numerous rituals, causes a significant decrease in the quality of life but it can also have serious consequences on the physical and mental health of the patient:

Deficiencies due to the exclusion of certain foods (iron deficiency anemia)

Weight loss

Increased risk of eating disorders

Hormonal dysregulation

Malnutrition / undernutrition due to unbalanced diet

Osteoporosis

Weakened immune system

Fatigue, difficulty in concentrating

How to manage orthorexia?

We recommend, above all, that you contact a health professional who will be able to help you and accompany you in your behavioral change (general practitioner, dietician, etc.)

If you feel that you have strict dietary requirements, and that your diet has become too demanding, there are several exercises that can help you reintroduce flexibility into your diet (6).

- **Listen to yourself:** take the time to pay attention to your sensations about eating (to learn more, please see our Newsletter #7)
- **Mindful eating:** relearn to appreciate food by using your 5 senses when eating
- **Let go:** try to eat without questioning the benefits or harms of food, and without controlling the quantities
- **Accept your cravings:** a few treats will not interfere with your dietary balance!

Reintroducing foods that were removed from your diet may seem daunting at first, but it takes several tries and perseverance! Keep in mind the reasons why you decided to change and return to a more relaxed diet, and don't get discouraged.

Conclusion

Orthorexia is an increasingly common disorder in today's society because it is partly driven by societal concerns and influences, which often revolve around both food and body health.

It is essential to remember the importance of the pleasure of eating, which is an essential part of a well-balanced diet. As the expression says, "Healthy mind dwells in a healthy body"; indeed, food pleasure and its associated benefits should not be neglected to contribute to a healthy body.



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