

The Internet and Eating Disorders:

How to Detect them Early

- There are nearly **4 million posts on the Internet with hashtags used by people with eating disorders** to share tricks or experiences to 'help' others lose weight.
- There are **5.8 million photos on Instagram with the hashtag #anorexia**.
- Online challenges that promote extreme thinness proliferate, such as **#A4PaperChallenge** that encourages people to show that their waist is narrower than a DIN A4 sheet of paper, or the **#iPhone6challenge** to prove that the width of your two knees together is not more than the length of the mobile phone.
- **Increased interest in their physical appearance, excessive physical exercise or restriction of food intake** are some of the most common symptoms analyzed by Qustodio that can help families detect future eating problems early.

Barcelona, October 14, 2020. The boom in the use of filters and retouching on social networks to look slimmer has increased social pressures around body image and caused an increase in eating disorders especially among young people. In



fact, a study from the University of Aston (Birmingham) states that users of social networks modify their diet in relation to what the people they follow online eat. In addition, according to the School of Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, people who spend more time on social networks have more problems with their image and their consumption habits,

Anorexia, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder are the main eating disorders that put physical and mental health at risk. In fact, **11% of young Spanish people likely suffer from some type of eating disorder**, according to a study by the Association Against Anorexia and Bulimia (ACAB).

This is not the only alarming figure. According to a report by the Internet Quality Agency, there are almost 4 million publications on the Internet with the tags #Ana (anorexia) and #Mía (bulimia), hashtags used by those affected to share tricks or experiences to 'help' others to slim down. Add to that the 5.8 million photos published on Instagram with the hashtag #anorexia.

Challenges that promote extreme thinness proliferate. Among the most popular, the one known as **#A4PaperChallenge** stands out. It encourages people to publish an image of themselves that shows that our waist is narrower than a DIN A4 sheet of paper. There is also the **#iPhone6Challenge** to prove that the width of your two knees together is not wider than the length of the mobile phone (13.8 cm/5.4 inches).

Qustodio, the leader in digital safety and wellbeing for families, coinciding with the celebration of World Food Day (October 16), has analyzed some of the most common symptoms that can help families detect future eating problems in time:

- **Increased interest in their physical appearance:** One of the first signs we see in young people is the desire to obtain a different physique. Bodies begin to change and when they are not sure of themselves they begin to obsess over clothes, they do not look good with anything or they start to wear clothes that are too loose to hide their figure.
- **Sudden changes in character:** increased irritability, arrogance and less communication and trust in parents. Teens tend to shy away from conversations and show depressive symptoms.
- **Excessive physical exercise:** practicing sports is recommended, but the increase in the demand and the number of hours that adolescents invest in it may indicate that they are doing physical exercise in a compulsive and unreasonable way.
- **Restriction of food intake:** avoiding eating certain foods, checking the number of calories they eat daily or significantly reducing the amount of food and denying the feeling of hunger are symptoms that may indicate a problem.

According to **María Guerrero**, an expert family psychologist at Qustodio, *"The internet has a huge impact on the lives of our children, especially in the years when they have not yet formed an identity. That's why it is very important that parents lead by example and teach their children to eat a healthy diet. This includes getting their participation in the buying and cooking process. In addition, parents must be aware of what their children are viewing online and what searches they are making. Tools like Qustodio that allow us to review their history can be of great help because early detection is key in these cases."*



About Qustodio

[Qustodio](#) is the world leader in online safety and digital wellbeing for families. Since 2012, our cross-platform parental control app and expert insights have helped parents around the world protect their children against online harm such as predators, cyberbullies and inappropriate content, while also helping them create healthy digital habits and awareness. With more than 2 million users, and accessible in 8 languages across +180 countries, Qustodio promotes the healthy use of technology, a safer internet, and open communication between parents and kids around the world.

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