

Eating Disorder Questions in *Yahoo! Answers*: Information, Conversation, or Reflection?

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Goals of this Study

- To identify the information needs of questioners in *Yahoo! Answers* vis á vis the topic of eating disorders;
- To create a typology of question types in *Yahoo! Answers* on the topic of eating disorders;
- To contribute to broader models of question-asking in social Q&A.

Background

Eating disorders and teens: A serious health problem

- **Many teens suffer from eating disorders**
 - In a survey of 6,728 American adolescents in fifth to twelfth grade, 13.4% of the female adolescents and 7.1% of the male adolescents indicated that they engaged in “disordered eating” (Neumark-Sztainer and Hannon , 2000)
- **There can be serious complications from eating disorders**
 - Cardiovascular, hematological, and immune system abnormalities and, for adolescents, long-term problems with bone density, linear growth, and even cognitive function and brain structure (Katzman et al., 2010).
- **Eating disorders can have lifetime effects**
(Rome et al. ,2003, p. 107).


But where do teens find answers to their health questions?

- **90 % of online teens** look for health information on the Web! (Rideout, 2001);
- Teens often use the Internet as the **primary source of information on sensitive or embarrassing health topics**, among them weight-related issues (Eysenbach, 2008, p. 127).
- The **social media sites** that are increasingly accessed by young people allow for individuals from outside of the medical profession to provide health information. The participatory nature of this health information calls into question the **reliability of the sources** (Bowler, He, Hong, 2011).

One source for health information...Social Q&A sites

- We decided to look at *Yahoo! Answers*, as one source where teens might seek answers to their questions about eating disorders;
- *Yahoo! Answers* is the fifth most visited social media web site, preceded only by the social media power houses of *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, and *Pinterest* (Dayton Business Journal, 2012).


Yahoo! Answers



How eating disorders have changed over the years?

Hi, I am writing a paper on the effect of advertising on eating disorders. I need some concrete statistics on how the prevalence of eating disorders has grown over the past decades. Does anybody have some/know where I could find some? Thanks :)

8 months ago [Report Abuse](#)




Best Answer - Chosen by Asker

I dont know the statistics. But i believe that eating disorder have increased because back in the day (80s and back) models had a more healthy bigger body type now a days models are so stick skinny its just not realistic or healthy for the average girl to be that skinny.

8 months ago [Report Abuse](#)

Asker's Rating: *****
thanks :)




Not the right answer? Try Yahoo! Search

Best answer chosen by asker

Yahoo! Answers

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Resolved Question [Show me another >](#)

What are the consequences of eating disorders?

Disagree...

I understand morally why eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia are bad, but I've never been taught what bad effects they actually have on health.

5 years ago [Report Abuse](#)



Best Answer - Chosen by Voters

Well, you need a certain amount of body fat in order to menstruate--body fat produces estrogen, and without the body fat, there's not enough estrogen to have a monthly cycle. In and of itself, this is quite dangerous--if you don't have enough estrogen to menstruate, then you don't have enough estrogen to support your bones. Until women are about 30 or 35, their bones are supposed to be increasing in density and strength. Then after that time, they can either maintain, or lose density and strength. If you don't menstruate, then you are automatically losing strength and density of bone, meaning you **WILL** get osteoporosis at a young age--you can NEVER make up what you lost or failed to build--and that's DANGEROUS. Everyone worries about cancer getting them, but osteoporosis is more deadly. Breaking your hip can leave you bedridden for the rest of your life, too. It's been shown that there are a lot of risks to the brain due to low estrogen, but there have not been studies of those who were anorexic in their youth. But hypothetically, you might be at greater risk of Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease. These are the dangers merely of not having your period. There is also, of course, major organ damage that can occur because of starvation--your organs shrink in size, as your body uses them to feed you. These are cells that might never be restored to these organs, even if you gain weight, so your organs are permanently weakened.

5 years ago [Report Abuse](#)

Best answer chosen by user community

Methods

Data Collection

- We obtained 2230 unique questions about eating disorders in *Yahoo! Answers* by using following search queries: ***eating disorder, anorexia, anorexic, bulimia, binge eating, & purging***
- *Data were collected on the Yahoo! Answers Application Programming Interface (API)*

(<http://developer.yahoo.com/answers/>)

Datasets

Content-rich dataset (N=180)

- 180 longest questions, no less than 450 words
- To capture the rich descriptors
- Highly descriptive

A five-W's approach to create a 10-category coding framework



Topic-related dataset (N=330)

- 330 questions with eating disorder-related keywords in the *title* to assure the “aboutness” of questions

Reduced to five overarching themes of teens' eating disorder questions

Results

Typology of questions asked by teens in *Yahoo! Answers*

Category	Sub-category
Seeking Information:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Factual2. Diagnosis3. Treatment or Intervention
Seeking Emotional Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Validation2. Seeking Comfort
Seeking Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Conversation starters2. Deep Talk
Seeking Self-Expression	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Confession2. Reflection
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Seeking Information

Factual Questions	Sample Questions from Question Titles
Health Information – Eating Disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How much would an anorexic teen girl weigh if they're 5'2 and of small build? - Approximately how many teens in the US suffer from an eating disorder?
Health Information – Diet and Fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is 1900 calories acceptable for an active teen?
Support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does anyone know any Teen Hotlines For Eating Disorders?!? - Christian eating disorder clinics?
Web-based resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a forum where teens can talk about eating disorders? - Is there a blog spot for teens recovering from eating disorders, if so please post the link?
Books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Books about teens with eating disorders?
Movies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you know any teen movies about anorexia, or bulleimia? [sic]
Career & Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the job description for dietitians who work with eating disorders? - Can you go to an ivy league if you have been to rehab for anorexia???

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Seeking Emotional Support

- **Validation, comfort, and moral support**

"My heart is beating so fast, but I know I have to tell her. My whole family suspects that I have an eating disorder, but I have yet to admit it. I know that she suffered from anorexia/bulimia when she was in her teens, and she is terrified of me going through that. Tell me exactly what to say. I'm lost. :(" [sic]

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Seeking Communication

Yahoo! Answers as a communication channel to open a conversation with answerers.

“...being a teen anorexic myself, *I need to talk about it* but naturally *can't tell anyone I know*. What are your opinions on teen anorexia? Do you scorn anorexics or pity them or do you just accept them? This is just out of curiosity”. [sic]

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Seeking Self-Expression

“...I am also having problems with doubting God.
What if there is no God? What is the purpose of
me living in depression if I will cease to exist?
What if our lives on earth are pointless?... I know
you guys don't really care about me but I am not
sure who to tell this to...” [827 word reflection]

- **A soliloquy. A question about eating disorders that really functions as a *confession* or a *reflection* on life.**

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Seeking Help to Complete a Task

- **Homework help:**
Topic ideas,
proofreading,
content for a
speech, or
completing a survey
for a science
project.

"Why are more teens
anorexic nowadays?..."

*A detailed answer
would be good :)*

Its for my science fair
project and I am
trying to thing of
good questions...
[sic]."

Conclusion

- A **tangled web of needs**, from informational to emotional, sometimes all bundled within the same question.
- **Implication:** Enriches our understanding of the affective dimension of health information behavior.

Conclusion

- A **place to vent emotions** or **quietly reflect on life**.
- **Implication:** May provide a safe space where some teens can work out problems without risking exposure or conflict with the people most close to them.

Conclusion

- Eating disorders sometimes accompanied by **a host of problems** – depression, anxiety disorders, drugs and alcohol use, social stability, family chaos – at least according to many of the question-askers.
- **Implication:** For some teens, *Yahoo! Answers* may not be the right place.

Conclusion

- Many questions are from teens (self-identified in the questions). *Yahoo! Answers* is part of the **health information ecology of teens**.
- **Implication:** More research needed to discover how teens are interacting with this and other social media tools in service to their own health and wellbeing.

Next Steps

- New study using our data set to investigate how teens assess the accuracy and reliability of answers in *Yahoo! Answers*;
- Work toward a model of adolescent health information behavior in the context of Social Q&A;
- A set of design recommendations for information systems and services that support the health information needs of young people.

Thank you