

Impact of Starvation in Eating Disorders

Many symptoms of eating disorders are symptoms of starvation. They occur when the body is in energy deficit. In eating disorders this may occur through dietary restriction, over exercise or purging.

PSYCHOSOCIAL CHANGES IN STARVATION



Psychological changes

Increased Anxiety.
Low mood / depression.
Irritability and outbursts of anger.
Emotional numbness.
Loss of interest in life.



Cognitive changes

Impaired concentration.
Impaired comprehension.
Difficulty making decisions.
Increased rigidity of thought.



Attitudes to eating

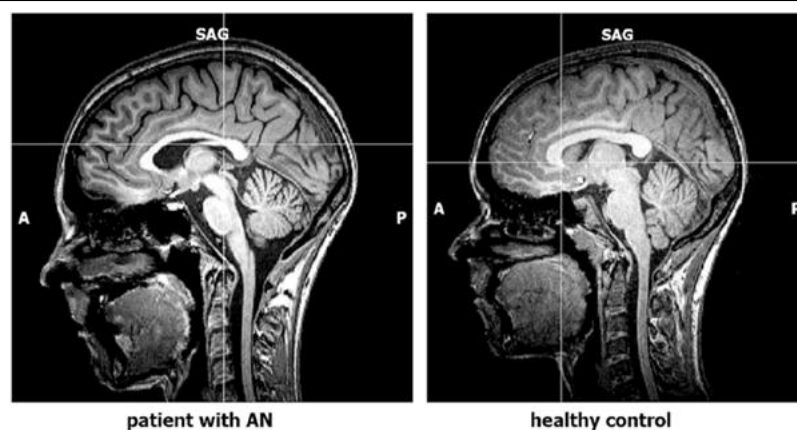
Preoccupation with food.
Eating very fast or very slowly.
Increased hunger.
Hoarding of food.



Social changes

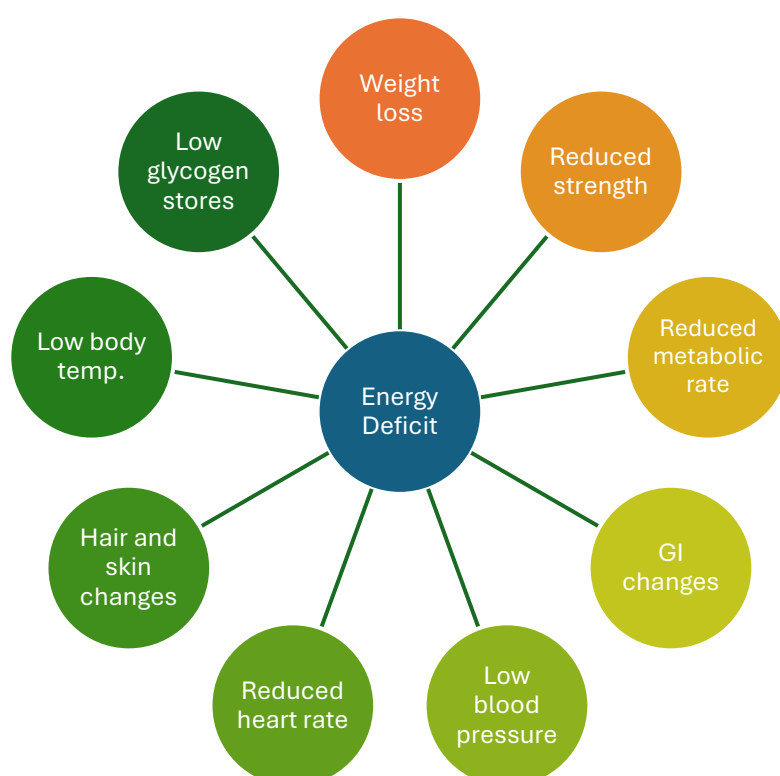
Social withdrawal.
Feelings of social inadequacy.
Reduced sense of humour.
Reduced interest in intimacy.
Strained relationships.

These psychosocial changes are mediated through morphological changes in the brain.



The changes interact with the eating disorder thoughts and feelings, amplifying them and maintaining the illness.

PHYSICAL CHANGES IN STARVATION



In severe starvation these physical changes can become life threatening. Guidance has been developed to support risk assessment in eating disorders: Medical Emergencies in Eating Disorders (MEED): Guidance on recognition and management. CR 233, Royal College of Psychiatrists, May 2022.

The severity of physical and psychosocial symptoms experienced will relate to the severity of starvation.

Most effects of starvation are reversible, and renourishment is an important first step in the treatment of eating disorders.

Once the symptoms of starvation are managed, further psychological intervention targeting eating disorder specific cognitions will be required.

How does this relate to T1DE? It is important to recognise that cellular starvation can result from insulin omission, regardless of weight or BMI in those with T1DE.