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# **Normalised Eating in the Treatment of Eating Disorders**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of**

**Master of Science**

**in**

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**Garalynne Stiles**

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## **Abstract**

**Background:** Normalising eating behaviour is one of the primary goals for recovery from eating disorders. There is a lack of consensus or working definition about what normalised eating is. Investigation of eating patterns in recovered eating disorder patients has been limited. The assumption appears to be that normalised eating will automatically follow weight restoration.

**Aim:** To describe normalised eating as a treatment goal for eating disorders among women aged 18 to 60 years using a sample of “expert opinions”.

**Methods:** Mixed methods design, including an online survey and in-depth interviews to expand on findings from the survey. Participants were recruited through online and print advertising. The online survey asked respondents to assess the “normality” of a range of eating practices and to give examples of eating in a “normal day”. Nutrient analysis was carried out using FoodWorks and SPSS was used for statistical tests. Content analysis was used for depth interviews and qualitative data from the online survey.

**Results & Conclusion:** Sixty-seven online surveys were completed by six women who had recovered from an eating disorder, 20 eating disorder dietitians, 15 other eating disorder clinicians and 26 healthy control women. A range of eating patterns and practices were described as normalised (e.g. 2-7 eating episodes in a day; cutting muffins in 1-4 pieces). While normalised eating is more likely to involve a specific set of actions (e.g. 3 meals and 2-3 snacks), reasons for eating seem to underpin normalised eating more than specific actions (e.g. “if hungry after dinner will have a piece of fruit”). Eating for a variety of reasons gives rise to flexibility. Flexibility within the confines of a nutritionally adequate diet was the central theme of normalised eating which emerged from this study.

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This study received ethical approval from the Health and Disability Northern X Regional Ethics Committee, ethics reference number NTX/12/EXP/025 and from the Auckland District Health Board Research Review Committee, reference number A+5425.

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## **Abbreviations**

EDNOS	Eating disorder not otherwise specified
DSM-IV	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4 <sup>th</sup> Edition
DAA	Dietitians Association of Australia
EDE-Q	Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire
BMI	Body Mass Index (kilograms / meters squared)
SD	Standard Deviation
NES	Normal Eating Scale
AMDR	Acceptable macronutrient distribution ranges
FANG	New Zealand Food and Nutrition Guidelines
NNS97	National Nutrition Survey 1997
ANS08/09	New Zealand Adult Nutrition Survey 2008/2009
IBW	Ideal body weight