

# Anorexia and the history of mental illness

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Anorexia Nervosa is a serious mental illness where a person has an obsessive fear of gaining weight so they allow themselves only very small portions of food, some even starving themselves. People with anorexia often have a distorted view of themselves. Anorexia most often starts in adolescence and is most common among girls. However anorexia can affect men and woman of any age, race, cultural and socioeconomic background. The average duration of Anorexia Nervosa is 7 years. Those who recover are unlikely to return to normal health. Anorexia Nervosa commences with early descriptions from the 16th and 17th centuries however it wasn't until late 19th century that it was considered a disease of the body and mind. Anorexia Nervosa is usually coupled with other mental illnesses. For most of early history, the mentally ill were seen as domestic responsibilities. In Christian Europe, families had full responsibilities for their troubled family members' actions. The severely deranged were typically housed in cellars or pigpen cages, hidden away from the world. They were watched over by servants. Families sent many mentally ill relatives far away because they were unable to care for them or they felt shame. An exception to that cruel and careless treatment was in the 14th Century, in Geel, where the mentally disabled were accepted into the healing shrine of St Dymphna. In France in the 16th Century they began to vastly sweep the streets to round up beggars, mentally ill and paupers. Over 6000 of these 'undesirables' resided in Paris's General Hospital. Houses for the 'mad' in France treated their patients as wild caged beasts. Those who were permitted to stay in their home were required to gain permission from the local officials. They were stripped of their legal rights and freedom. Colonists in the Colonial American

society thought the mentally ill to be possessed by the devil, they were removed from society and locked away. Colonists believed they had to expel or catalyse the crisis from the individual. That was done by immersing patients in ice baths until they lost consciousness or sending a big shock to the brain. To expel the crisis they would induce vomiting or bleeding. The bleeding practice involved draining the 'bad blood' from the individual. Around the 19th Century the European brought in a new approach to treating the mentally ill. This was known as 'Moral Management.' It was based on the belief that environmental factors are important in the treatment of mental illness. Beds, pictures and decorations were used instead of shackles and restraints. They concentrated more on the benefits of relaxation and hypnosis. A pivotal point in the history of mental illness was the civil war. Many service men suffered from post-war trauma and there was a great need for care. Because of the overcrowding, institutions reinstated restraints and shock therapy along with new drugs such as opium. As people learn more about mental illnesses it becomes more and more accepted and less feared. There is a lot of help for those suffering from anorexia and other mental issues these days. Millon, T. Masters of the mind, exploring the story of mental illness from ancient times to the new millennium Mora, George. (1970) The History of Psychiatry: Its Relevance for the Psychiatrist, The American Journal Of Psychiatry, doi: 10. 1176/appi. ajp. 126. 7. 957 The History of Mental Illness (n. d) Retrieved from <http://www.toddlertime.com/advocacy/hospitals/Asylum/history-asylum.htm> Roosens, Eugeen. (1979) Mental patients in town life: Geel, Europe's first therapeutic community. Beverly Hills, Sage Publications.