

Stress and Eating Behaviors of Dietitians Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Objectives: To determine the relationships between stress experienced by registered dietitians, eating competence, and risk for orthorexia nervosa amid the backdrop of COVID-19.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was used to compare Perceived Stress Scale, ORTO-15 Questionnaire, and Satter Eating Competence Inventory 2.0 scores computed from participant responses to understand how prevalence of stress, risk for orthorexia nervosa, and eating competence in registered dietitians relate to one another. Independent sample *t*-tests, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and two-way ANOVA were used to compare scores. A random sample of 5,000 registered dietitians in the United States were invited to complete an online survey; 155 responses were received.

Results: Scores for the final sample ($N = 83$) suggested 63.9% had high stress, 61.4% were at risk for orthorexia nervosa, and 80.7% were eating competent. Statistical analysis revealed a negative association between stress and eating competence, but no relationship between stress and orthorexia nervosa risk. Risk for orthorexia nervosa and eating competence were positively associated.

Conclusions: Further exploration of the relationship between stress and eating competence in registered dietitians may offer insight into addressing stress in the dietetics profession. The positive association between orthorexia nervosa risk and eating competence may imply the presence of healthy orthorexia, or a non-pathological focus on eating healthfully, in registered dietitians.

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