

## New book examines 'almost anorexia'

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Schaefer

### To know more

"Almost Anorexic: Is My (or My Loved One's) Relationship with Food a Problem?" by Jennifer J. Thomas, Ph.D., and Jenni Schaefer, is available from Hazelden and is part of the Harvard Health Publications series. Find out more at [www.almostanorexic.com](http://www.almostanorexic.com).

A new book written Harvard Medical School assistant professor and an eating disorder author and speaker proposes the number of people struggling with attitudes about food is higher than previously thought.

"Almost Anorexic: Is My (or My Loved One's) Relationship with Food a Problem?", by Dr. Jennifer J. Thomas, Ph.D., and Jenni Schaefer, published as part of Harvard Health Publications' "The Almost Effect" series, looks at the possibility of a sub-threshold disorder the authors refer to as "almost anorexia."

Schaefer spoke about eating disorders in Great Falls last April.

"People think of anorexia nervosa as rare," Thomas said. "Only one in 200 people will have it in their lifetime. But many more people are going to have almost anorexia."

Thomas and Schaefer's book claims that as many as one in 20 people have the signs of almost anorexia, including frequent food restriction and weight changes, negative body image, mild or infrequent binge eating and mild or infrequent compensatory behavior.

Those symptoms do not qualify as anorexia nervosa, which is marked by severe low weight, intense fear of weight gain and lack of recognition of medical consequences of the disorder, but they may be leading to full-blown anorexia, the authors say.

"When I was struggling nobody really reached out to me in the early stages," said Schaefer, who dealt with anorexia during college but was not diagnosed until afterward. "During the almost anorexic phase of my illness, I often looked normal. I was a normal weight so nobody questioned I might be struggling."

Some people with eating disorders often use diagnostic criteria to rule themselves out, and Schaefer admits to doing this while she was dealing with almost anorexia. The challenge of diagnosing an eating disorder and getting help is compounded by new diagnostic criteria in the fifth volume of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, commonly called the DSM-5.

"Diagnostic criteria are kind of a moving target," Thomas said.

“I think the point of the DSM-5 was to broaden criteria so more people could get help, but the boundary between anorexia nervosa and normal eating is still blurry.”