

GÜRZE/SALUCORE

Eating Disorders

> RESOURCE CATALOGUE


**PSYCHEDELICS
AND EATING
DISORDER
TREATMENT**

**The Impact of
Weight Stigma
on Children**

**CULTIVATING
POSITIVE
BODY IMAGE**

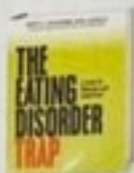
THE MOST
WIDELY-USED
RESOURCE
IN THE EATING
DISORDERS FIELD
SINCE 1980

2021
EDcatalogue.com

 GÜRZE
SALUCORE

ADVANCEMENTS IN THE FIELD // EMERGING RESEARCH // RECOVERY & SUPPORT

Book Excerpt



The Eating Disorder Trap: A Guide for Clinicians and Loved Ones

In this excerpt from *The Eating Disorder Trap*, Robyn L. Goldberg, RDN, CEDRD-S, describes how malnutrition affects the heart.

Healing the Broken Heart

We all know that the heart is the life source of our body. It is a muscle that works 24/7, every second of a person's life. Just as with any machine, its parts wear down with time and use. However, this wear and tear is significantly expedited when illness or malnutrition comes into play.

Bradycardia (slowing down of the heart rate) is one of the first adjustments the heart will make when faced with malnutrition. To get a picture of how much energy it takes for the heart to beat, imagine yourself squeezing a ball strongly and rapidly every second of every day for an undetermined amount of days. That's a lot of energy!

The brain is aware of this, and in times of deficit, will send a signal via the vagus nerve (one of the cranial nerves that influences the heart, lungs, and digestive system) to slow down these organs. The heart can slow down from a normal range of 60 to 100 beats per minute to as low as 20 beats per minute. As a point of reference, a well-trained "healthy" athlete's heart can beat as low as 50 beats per minute. However, this slow of a heart rate isn't always a sign of fitness and may indicate there is more to the story. The result of a slowed heart rate is that not enough oxygen reaches organs, leading to some of the following symptoms: fainting, dizziness, fatigue, chest pain, confusion, and exhaustion.

Malnutrition can also result in the muscle of the heart shrinking, and its inside chamber size decreasing.

When the heart beats slower, less blood is pumped per beat, so it has to work harder to get the same work done. Hence, the heart becomes strained, stuck between needing to simultaneously slow down and speed up.

If that were not enough to weaken the heart, malnutrition from eating disorders affects the electrical activity of the heart. The electrical activity of the heart conducts its muscle contraction. This dysregulation results in dysrhythmias (abnormal heartbeat) that can become severe enough to cause death. An ECC/EKG can detect this and should be part of the cardiac workup of a person with malnutrition. These rhythm changes can make one feel like their heart is racing and beating stronger (called palpitations), or can occur without symptoms, be sudden, and be fatal.

The heart pumps blood throughout the body, hence a weak and strained heart impacts blood pressure. As the body is trying to save energy, blood is pumped primarily to vital organs. As a result, people will often report that their extremities (fingers, toes, hands, and feet) are cold. Eventually, the whole body becomes cold.

This can be demonstrated by a capillary refill delay. You can test this by squeezing your hand into a fist for a few seconds, opening it, and seeing how fast pink color returns to the hand. If it takes more than two seconds or so, it can be an indication of this delay. ♦

Reprinted with permission from Robyn L. Goldberg, *The Eating Disorder Trap: A Guide for Clinicians and Loved Ones*, 180 pages, paper/e-book, 2020.