

Eating and Exercise
Behaviours in Trans and
Gender Diverse Adults
Research Summary



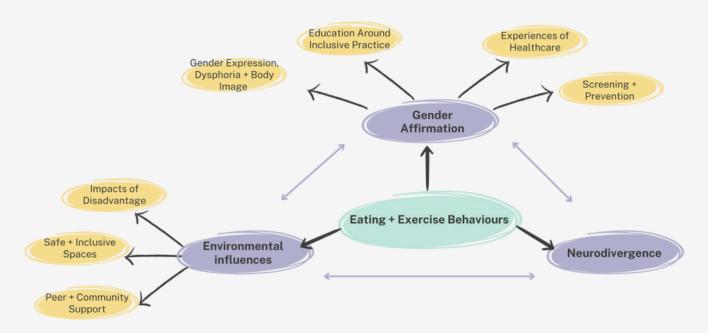
The experiences of trans and gender diverse people (TGD) around eating and exercise are deeply influenced by their unique socio-environmental and personal challenges. A recent study by <u>Schweizer and peers (2025)</u> published in the International Journal of Transgender Health, sheds light on these experiences, emphasising the importance of inclusive and supportive approaches to promoting healthy behaviours in the trans community.

Methods

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 participants: 12 TGD people sharing their lived experiences and 13 healthcare professionals involved in supporting TGD communities, with 6 participants in both groups. Participants were recruited from various community networks, healthcare settings, and social media.

Results

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, allowing researchers to identify key themes that shape eating and exercise behaviours and motivations. Analysis resulted in identification of three themes: (1) gender affirmation, (2) neurodivergence, and (3) environmental influences



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Key Findings

Gender Affirmation

Participants described exercise and eating as tools for gender affirmation. For example, exercise helped some trans men build muscle, aligning their bodies with their gender identity. However, societal pressures to conform to binary gender norms sometimes led to disordered behaviours, such as excessive exercise or restrictive eating.

Neurodivergence

A significant portion of the sample identified as neurodivergent, with presentations including ADHD or Autism influencing their eating and exercise patterns. This interplay of identities highlights the need for tailored support.

Environmental Influences

Systemic barriers such as food insecurity, stigma in fitness spaces, and lack of inclusive healthcare were frequently reported. Participants emphasised the need for safe, affirming environments to promote healthful practices.

"I've noticed in more my more binary friends, they, they really care about self-image, how they present themselves tells how the world sees them. And a lot of that is informed by the social construct that we already have. Like a woman needs to look this way. A man needs to look that way."

"I didn't know about top surgery or hormone replacement therapy. The only conclusion I could come to is the only way I can change my body to reflect how I want people to treat me, and my inner world is by starving it."





Scientific & Community Implications

TGD people often navigate unique challenges, including high rates of disordered eating and exercise behaviours linked to societal and internal pressures.

Healthcare providers must adopt gender-affirming and person-centred approaches, considering both the physiological and psychosocial aspects of eating and exercise for TGD people. The authors advocate for multi-disciplinary teams involving dietitian, exercise professionals, and mental health experts to address these needs.

Community-led initiatives, such as inclusive fitness programs and accessible nutrition resources, can further mitigate barriers.

Acknowledging the lived experiences of TGD folks is critical to shaping effective, respectful interventions.

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For more information & updates:



Kai Schweizer, Felicity Austin, Kemi Wright, Ben Jackson, Ashleigh Lin, Penelope Strauss & Bonnie Furzer (2025). Eating and exercise experiences of Australian trans and gender diverse folks: lived experience and stakeholder perspectives, International Journal of Transgender Health. DOI: 10.1080/26895269.2024.2447765



Eating and exercise experiences of Australian trans and gender diverse folks: lived experience and stakeholder perspectives

Participant Responses

"More training across allied health and medical professionals as well. I think there's a lot of people that maybe have good interests at heart, but perhaps not quite educated enough to seem approachable and helpful to the trans and gender diverse community"

"Well timed and good access to gender affirming care can be really protective for some people around risky food behaviors" **Experiences of Healthcare**

"Definitely one of the main parts of being trans that your body is feels so unbelievably wrong to you. So, I suppose most people, or a lot of people want to change their bodies and getting as close to what they want it to be as possible."

Gender Expression, Dysphoria + **Body Image**

"It can be really hard to get what's ideal support with all these financial barriers"

Impacts of Disadvantage

Education Around Inclusive Practice

"Many clinicians aren't trained in what to look for in disordered eating. They don't know that the risk of engaging in disordered eating and exercise behaviors is higher among gender diverse people. So often, people are telling the clinicians all the information they need, but it's not being interpreted in a way that looks" Screening + Prevention

Eating + Exercise Behaviours

Gender

Affirmation

Environmental influences

Neurodivergence

"Trying to go to gyms or like going to like public spaces where I have to exist around people, as a visibly trans person is just always going to be taxing"

Safe + Inclusive Spaces

"I think that having peers is a way to take in information in a way that's probably less threatening and potentially make it more enjoyable experience, it is more empowering and less like another adult, parent or professional trying to force something onto them."

Peer + Community Support

"I can't be an Autistic transgender person that suffers from anorexia, I have to just be transgender, or just be Autistic, or just suffer from anorexia."

Neurodivergence

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