



NZ consumer backgrounder

**TUES, MARCH 10, 2020**

## About the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI)

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- The Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) is the world's largest genetic investigation of eating disorders ever performed.
- The local arm of EDGI aims to identify the genes that predispose people to developing anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder in order to find new treatments, and ultimately find a cure for the disorders.
- Identification of the genes that predispose individuals to eating disorders will revolutionise future research into causes, treatment, and prevention of the illness.
- EDGI follows the ground-breaking advances that have been made recently through another collaborative study (the Anorexia Nervosa Genetics Initiative/ANGI) in which researchers, including the EDGI team, have identified both psychiatric and metabolic causes for anorexia nervosa.
- The University of Otago in Christchurch is the centre for the New Zealand arm of the research study.
- The EDGI project in New Zealand is jointly led by Dr Jennifer Jordan, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Psychological Medicine, and Professor Martin Kennedy, Head of Department of Pathology and Biomedical Science Director, both at the University of Otago, Christchurch.
- Australia, The United States of America, United Kingdom, and Denmark each have centres contributing to the initiative.
- New Zealand aims to recruit more than 3,500 New Zealanders who have been diagnosed with an eating disorder, including a control group (people without eating disorders), by March 31, 2022.
- This ground-breaking research should identify hundreds of genes that influence a person's risk of developing an eating disorder.
- Cracking the genetic code will enable us to develop new, and more effective, personalised treatments that target the problem directly.
- Many international studies to date have explored an individual's genetic predisposition to eating disorders. However, only a handful of the specific predisposing genes have been identified, and there are many more to be found.
- Study researchers will analyse DNA from saliva samples to point toward specific genes associated with eating disorders.
- Before analysis can begin, DNA is extracted from the saliva sample and genotyped to provide a read out of each participant's genetic code.
- The analysis process, known as a 'genome-wide association study (GWAS), involves comparing the genotypes of people who have experienced eating disorders with the genotype of those who are yet to experience an eating disorder.
- The study will allow researchers to identify genetic factors that determine why some people experience eating disorders, while others do not, and why some people living with eating disorders respond to certain treatments, while others do not.
- Comparing the EDGI sample with other conditions will also help us understand the genetic relationship among eating disorders and commonly co-occurring conditions such as depression, anxiety or substance use problems, or some metabolic conditions or other health problems.
- This knowledge will be used to improve existing treatments, and to develop new treatments for eating disorders.

## Study participation

- Participating in this study could make a genuine contribution to the diagnosis, management and treatment of eating disorders.
- All participants need to be 16 years and over.
- Study participation is strictly confidential. All participant information provided will be maintained in accordance with the NZ Privacy Act 1993, and research information will be de-identified before being sent overseas for analysis.
- Study participation involves providing informed consent and completing an online survey which should take approximately 40 - 60 minutes.
- After completing the questionnaires, eligible participants will be asked to donate a saliva sample.
- Researchers will send a saliva collection kit together with a pre-paid return envelope to selected participants.
- EDGI researchers will extract DNA from saliva samples to identify specific genes associated with eating disorders.
- Each eligible NZ participant will receive a NZ\$30 gift card.



To volunteer for, or learn more about the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative, head to [www.edgi.nz](http://www.edgi.nz) or email [edgi@otago.ac.nz](mailto:edgi@otago.ac.nz).

Should you suspect that you, or a loved one, may be living with an eating disorder, speak to your general practitioner without delay.

If you need to talk to a trained counsellor about any mental health issue, contact the 1737 helpline; free call or text 1737 or visit <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/mental-health-addictions/mental-health-addictions/1737-need-to-talk/>.

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*Issued by VIVA! Communications on behalf of the University of Otago.*

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