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Do antidepressants help eating disorders?

Eating disorders can often be managed without medicines. Sydney psychiatrist Dr Lisa Lampe believes, however, that antidepressants could play an important role in some cases.

In the latest issue of *Australian Prescriber*, Dr Lampe examines alternative uses for antidepressant medicines. "Antidepressants are useful in a range of disorders other than depression," says Dr Lampe.

Trials have shown that binge eating and purging in people with bulimia nervosa can be reduced with antidepressant medicines. They can also improve a person's perception about their body and weight.

However, psychological therapy is more likely to prevent relapse in someone with bulimia nervosa. In the case of anorexia nervosa, medicines have not been proven to have any significant advantage.

According to Dr Lampe, some people suffering panic, social anxiety disorder, generalised anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder may benefit from different types of antidepressants. "Most people with anxiety disorders will benefit more from having therapy than from taking medicines," said Dr Lampe. "But, in some cases antidepressants are worth considering, especially if other therapy is not working."

Trials have shown people with anxiety disorders respond better and relapse less if they undertake psychological therapy. Antidepressant treatment is sometimes used to enhance this therapy.

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