The major eating disorders, anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, and variants thereof, have entered the arena of sophisticated research relatively recently compared with the schizophrenic spectrum and affective disorders.

In the past 3 decades, ample literature of descriptive and correlational studies has accumulated, identifying some unique features of these disorders. However, at present, informative research for predictably effective treatment is not available. Understanding the biological vulnerabilities in the development of these maladaptive behaviors may lead to the creation of effective treatment interventions and prevention of chronic relapsing states in these disorders.

This issue begins with an overview of some practical information that may be useful for the assessment and treatment of eating disorders (see page 522).

Guido K.W. Frank, MD, discusses possible aberrations in the brain neurocircuitry in eating disorders based on recent research using a variety of neuroimaging techniques (see page 526).

It is well-established that eating disorders are heritable. The progress in behavioral and molecular genetic and epigenetic studies in eating disorders and their potential promise for future treatment application is reviewed by Stephanie Zerwas, PhD, and colleagues (see page 532).

The perplexities of interpreting various batteries of neuropsychological testing in eating disorders are explained by Nancy Zucker, PhD (see page 539) and colleagues. The persistence of set-shifting deficits is a more recent finding.

To date, the most robust treatment studies of anorexia nervosa with the lowest dropout rates and best outcome are those with family therapy of youth and adolescents. James Lock, MD, PhD, presents a description of these studies (see page 547).

A plausible conclusion is that the best way to prevent chronic anorexia nervosa is to effectively treat adolescent anorexia nervosa before the legal age of 18 years...
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Dr. Halmi is a past president of the American Psychopathological Association; past president of the Society of Biological Psychiatry; past president of Psychiatric Research Society; and past president of the Eating Disorder Research Society.

Dr. Halmi is currently conducting a multicenter family therapy study on the treatment of adolescent anorexia nervosa. She is also part of a multicenter genetic study of eating disorders.