

Eating Disorders

Anyone can get an eating disorder, but teenagers between 13 and 17 are mostly affected. An eating problem is any relationship with food that you find difficult. It is a mental health condition where you use the control of food to cope with feelings and other situations.

Unhealthy eating behaviours may include eating too much or too little or worrying about your weight or body shape.

Eating problems are not just about food. They can be about difficult things and painful feelings, which you may be finding hard to face or resolve. Many people think that if you have an eating problem you will be over- or underweight, and that being a certain weight is always associated with a specific eating problem, but this is a myth. Anyone, regardless of age, gender or weight, can be affected by eating problems.

The most common eating disorder diagnoses are anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder, and other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED). However, it is also possible to have a very difficult relationship with food and not fit the criteria for any specific diagnosis.

Types of eating disorders

The most common eating disorders are:

- anorexia nervosa – trying to control your weight by not eating enough food, exercising too much, or doing both
- bulimia – losing control over how much you eat and then taking drastic action to not put on weight
- binge eating disorder (BED) – eating large portions of food until you feel uncomfortably full

If you or people around you are worried that you have an unhealthy relationship with food, you could have an eating disorder.

Symptoms of eating disorders include:

- spending a lot of time worrying about your weight and body shape
- avoiding socialising when you think food will be involved
- eating very little food
- making yourself sick or taking laxatives after you eat
- exercising too much
- having very strict habits or routines around food
- changes in your mood such as being withdrawn, anxious or depressed

Warning signs of an eating disorder in someone else

It can be very difficult to identify that a loved one or friend has developed an eating disorder.

Warning signs to look out for include:

- dramatic weight loss
- lying about how much they've eaten, when they've eaten, or their weight
- eating a lot of food very fast
- going to the bathroom a lot after eating
- exercising a lot
- avoiding eating with others
- cutting food into small pieces or eating very slowly
- wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss

Some people do not seek help because they think their problem is not serious enough. Sometimes they do not feel 'ill enough' to have an eating problem. It is also possible to have problems with eating and keep them hidden.

Keeping track of your eating habits is a great way to aid recovery. An effective way to begin identifying problem areas and tracking progress is to complete a weekly food journal. This food journal is helpful because it allows you to track your food intake, progress, and identify problematic patterns and errors in your weekly routine.

It can also serve as motivation for recovery because as you continue to complete weekly food journals you will see the progress you are making, which will encourage you to continue to work hard to reach your goals.

Resources:

Food Journal

Challenging Eating Disorder Thought

Information Booklet

Getting the balance right (nutrition)

Eating Problems

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/eating-problems/about-eating-problems/>

Helping Someone With an Eating Disorder

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/eating-disorders/helping-someone-with-an-eating-disorder.htm>

Beating Eating Disorders

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>