

What are they?

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions where food, eating, or body image becomes a major source of anxiety or control. They are not a choice, and anyone can be affected - regardless of gender, age, or background. Common types of eating disorders include:

- Anorexia nervosa – restriction of food intake, extreme fear of weight gain
- Bulimia nervosa – bingeing and purging
- Binge eating disorder – eating large amounts of food in a short time, often in secret
- ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) – not related to body image but to fear of eating or sensory issues

Useful videos:

The following video titles on YouTube may offer useful guidance;

- 'Eating Disorders: A Parent and Carer Workshop'
- 'Eating Disorders: Advice for Families (Prof Janet Treasure)'
- 'Parenting a Teen – How Eating Disorders Affect Young People (Fiona Duffy)'



Getting support

If you have concerns about your young person, it may be helpful to seek help from:

Seek medical help if:

- Your young person's eating patterns are worrying you
- Their weight is dropping rapidly
- There are signs of purging, fainting, or obsessive behaviours

Start with:

- Your GP – for physical checks and referrals
- CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- School mental health or safeguarding lead
- Eating disorder charities (see below)

Helpful organisations:

- BEAT (Beating Eating Disorders)
www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk
Helpline: (0808) 801 0677
- YoungMinds www.youngminds.org.uk
- Mind www.mind.org.uk
- Anorexia and Bulimia Care
www.anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk

School contacts:

- Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Mental Health Lead
- SENDCO (if applicable)
- Head of Year or Pastoral Manager
- All available on (01932) 219400

Mental Health Support

Leaflet 4



Information to support if you are worried that your young person may have an eating disorder

Warning signs:

There are several signs to look out for if you are worried that your young person may have an eating disorder. Signs may be physical, emotional or behavioural. Watch out for;

Physical:

- Noticeable weight loss (or gain), dizziness, feeling cold
- Changes to hair, skin, or menstrual cycle
- Frequent complaints of stomach pain or nausea

Emotional:

- Anxiety around mealtimes
- Low self-esteem or poor body image
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Irritability, mood swings, or increased sensitivity

Behavioural:

- Hiding food or secretly disposing of it
- Skipping meals or saying they've eaten when they haven't
- Rituals around food (cutting food into tiny pieces, eating very slowly)
- Frequent trips to the toilet after meals
- Compulsive exercising
- Obsession with calories, dieting, or 'clean eating'
- Avoiding situations involving food (for example, parties, family meals)

How can I help?

The following strategies can help if your young person is struggling with an eating disorder;

Stay calm and open

- Don't criticise or comment on their body or eating
- Avoid blaming or guilt-based language
- Say: 'I'm worried about you. How can I help?'

Focus on feelings, not food

- The food behaviours are a symptom so try to understand the emotions underneath

Keep mealtimes calm

- Avoid arguments at the table
- Create a routine, but don't force food
- Sit together without pressure or judgement

Avoid diet talk

- Model body acceptance and avoid 'good/bad' food language

Get professional help early

- Early intervention leads to better outcomes - don't wait

Support that can be offered in school, includes well-being check-ins, safe spaces, a discreet support plan agreed with you and your young person, pastoral care and mental health support.

Why do they start?

There's often no single cause. Eating disorders can develop due to a mix of emotional, psychological, social, and biological factors. Possible contributors include:

- **Low self-esteem or perfectionism**
Individuals may try to gain control or self-worth through rigid eating or appearance-focused goals.
- **Anxiety, depression, or trauma**
Difficult emotions can lead to disordered eating as a way to cope, numb, or regain a sense of control.
- **Bullying or peer pressure**
Negative comments or social exclusion about weight or appearance can trigger unhealthy eating behaviours.
- **Cultural or media messages about weight and body shape**
Constant exposure to unrealistic beauty standards can create pressure to diet or alter one's body.
- **Major life changes (for example, transitions, bereavement)**
Emotional upheaval may cause a young person to focus on eating or body control when everything else feels uncertain.
- **Autism, OCD, or other neurodivergent profiles**
These can increase vulnerability to restrictive eating habits.