

Information for parents

Eating disorders are a complex combination of physical and mental issues. They are manifested by obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours around food. Symptoms vary between patients and some may have a mix of symptoms.

Eating disorders are generally associated with people who have low self-esteem and feelings of self-loathing. They can often manifest themselves in high achieving individuals who have an obsessive desire to seek and achieve perfection.

Eating disorders most commonly heard about are Anorexia, Bulimia and Binge eating (or compulsive eating).

Anorexia (Anorexia Nervosa)

This often starts during the teens and may be a result of emotional problems connected with becoming an adult, as well as low self-esteem and, in some cases, physical or emotional abuse.

It shares many features with bulimia. People with anorexia develop a fear of fatness that goes far beyond that of most dieters. The need to control their weight dominates all other emotions and food becomes the central issue of their lives.

For the anorexic person, absolute control over their own body might be one way of dealing with their perceived lack of control over all other aspects of their lives. They are obsessed with food and being thin, sometimes to the point of deadly self-starvation. They may exercise excessively or simply not eat enough calories.

Typically, anorexic people tend to be perfectionist in other areas of their lives and tend to be high achievers academically. Obsessions with weight and shape, exercising and the use of vomiting and laxatives to reduce weight are often major elements.

People with anorexia have a very low body weight, which can cause serious medical problems, including poor circulation, brittle bones, infertility, fainting and dizziness, dehydration and kidney damage.

The consequences of inadequate nutrition in the long term can be slowed heartbeat, low blood pressure and reduced body temperature.

It's important to seek medical help as soon as possible because some of these problems, if left untreated, may not improve when the person recovers from anorexia.

Anorexia is estimated to affect between one and five teenage women in every 100,000, and the age at which most cases develop is 16 to 17.

For boys who develop the problem (about five to ten per cent of all cases), 12 is the peak age.

What are the symptoms?

The stereotypical image of an anorexic is of a bed-bound teenage girl looking as though she's just arrived from one of the world's famine spots. But it's important to remember that this kind of intense starvation is not the only symptom of an eating disorder. A person with an eating disorder may maintain a normal body weight and so their condition may go unnoticed for years. This is more often the case with bulimia.

Anorexia symptoms may include:

- Thin appearance
- Fatigue/tiredness
- Dizziness or fainting
- Brittle nails
- Hair that thins, breaks or falls out
- Soft, downy hair covering the body
- Menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation (no periods - amenorrhea)
- Constipation
- Dry skin
- Frequently being cold
- Irregular heart rhythms
- Low blood pressure
- Dehydration

Emotional and behavioural symptoms of anorexia may include:

- Refusal to eat
- Denial of hunger
- Excessive exercise
- Flat mood or lack of emotion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Preoccupation with food

Things that family and friends may notice include:

- Skipping meals
- Making excuses for not eating
- Eating only a few certain "safe" foods, usually those low in fat and calories
- Adopting rigid meal or eating rituals, such as cutting food into tiny pieces or spitting food out after chewing
- Moving food around the plate, playing with food or hiding things under cutlery etc
- Weighing food
- Cooking elaborate meals for others but refusing to eat them themselves
- Repeated weighing of themselves
- Frequent checking in the mirror for perceived flaws
- Wearing baggy or layered clothing
- Complaining about being fat

Bulimia (Bulimia nervosa)

Like anorexia, bulimia develops from an obsessive desire to be thin. However, instead of not eating, the person alternates between frantic bingeing (eating huge amounts of food in one large sitting) and drastic purging (this is getting rid of food that has been eaten by self-induced vomiting and the abuse of laxatives)

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and diuretics) or periods of excessive fasting and exercise. In between these binge-purge episodes, they may eat very little or skip meals altogether.

In the long-term, treating the body in this way, can cause irregular heartbeat and damaged kidneys. Continual vomiting also seriously erodes tooth enamel.

Although anorexia is the illness that receives the most media attention, bulimia is in fact far more common. Both occur mainly - though not exclusively - in females.

Bulimia is estimated to affect between 1% and 2% of women aged 15 to 40.

Bulimia symptoms may include:

- Abnormal bowel functioning
- Damaged teeth and gums
- Swollen salivary glands in the cheeks
- Sores in the throat and mouth
- Bloating
- Dehydration
- Fatigue
- Dry skin
- Irregular heartbeat
- Sores, scars or calluses on the knuckles or hands
- Menstrual irregularities or loss of menstruation (no periods - amenorrhea)

Emotional and behavioural symptoms of bulimia may include:

- Constant dieting
- Feelings of not being able to control eating behaviours
- Eating until the point of discomfort or pain
- Self-induced vomiting
- Laxative use
- Excessive exercise
- Unhealthy focus on body shape and weight
- Having a distorted, excessively negative body image
- Going to the bathroom after eating or during meals
- Hoarding food
- Depression or anxiety

Binge Eating (Compulsive eating)

When someone has a binge-eating disorder, they regularly eat excessive amounts of food (binge), sometimes for hours on end. They may eat when they're not hungry and continue eating even long after they are uncomfortably full.

Compulsive eaters differ from people with bulimia in that, after binge eating, they don't try to get rid of what they've eaten. Many of them feel powerless to control their desire to keep 'comfort eating'. They may develop health problems as a result of carrying too much weight.

Binge eating symptoms may include:

- Periodically not exercising control over consumption of food
- Eating an unusually large amount of food at one time - more than a normal person would eat in the same amount of time.
- Eating much more quickly during binge episodes than during normal eating episodes
- Eating until physically uncomfortable
- Eating large amounts of food even when they are not really hungry
- Usually someone will eat alone during binge eating episodes, in order to avoid discovery of the disorder

Emotional and behavioural symptoms of binge-eating disorder may include:

- Eating to the point of discomfort or pain
- Eating much more food during a binge episode than during a normal meal or snack
- Eating faster during binge episodes
- Feeling that the eating behaviour is out of control
- Frequent dieting without weight loss
- Frequently eating alone
- Hoarding food
- Hiding empty food containers
- Feeling depressed, disgusted or upset over the amount eaten
- Depression or anxiety

How can I help my teen?

Teenage girls are at the greatest risk of developing anorexia, and parents may miss many of the signs. They may not share their feelings about their body with you. They may also exercise, vomit and take laxatives secretly.

Low mood may be difficult to spot in an uncommunicative teenager, and lack of interest in sex is not something most parents worry about in their teenage daughters. Good communication and trying to remain open are obviously crucial, but eating habits may be the only easily noted sign.

Many people with anorexia develop a detailed knowledge of the nutritional content of foods, including the crucial role of carbohydrates in maintaining body weight, which they avoid.

As part of their developing knowledge and interest in food, some people prepare elaborate meals for other people, but eat very little of it themselves.

Attempting to miss meals, not eating with the family or visiting the toilet soon after eating may also be reasons to be concerned, although they're not conclusive proof of a problem.

Eating disorders in youngsters

Eating disorders can affect people of any age. In children, it's sometimes hard to tell what an eating disorder is and what's simply a whim, a new fad, or experimentation with a new diet or other eating styles. In addition, many girls and sometimes boys go on diets to lose weight, but stop dieting after a short time.

If you're a parent or guardian, be careful not to mistake occasional dieting with an eating disorder. On the other hand, be alert for eating patterns and beliefs that may signal unhealthy behaviour, as well as peer pressure that may trigger eating disorders.

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What professional help is available?

Therapies available on the NHS include:

- cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- motivational enhancement therapy (MET)
- family therapy
- psychodynamic therapy.

If you are worried talk to your GP – that's always a good place to start. They will know what help is available locally and can make referrals as necessary.

Support groups and sources of information

Local Support

Sheffield Eating Disorders Service

A specialist eating disorder service provided by Sheffield Care Trust which provides assessment, individual and group therapy and support for people with severe anorexia/bulimia nervosa. A treatment plan is agreed and individual or group therapy is provided in the outpatient clinic. Young people aged under 16 years are usually referred to the sector Child and Family Therapy Teams. Limited advice and support to relatives and carers. Referral is via a mental health worker.

Contact Details

St Georges Community Health Centre
Winter Street, Sheffield S3 7ND

Office days and times: Mon-Fri 8.30am-4.30pm

Contact Name: Maggie Young, Team Co-ordinator

Telephone 1: 0114 271 6938

Telephone 2: 0114 271 6930

Telephone 2 Details: and answerphone

Fax: 0114 226 2223

Email: shona.mcbride@sct.nhs.uk

South Yorkshire Eating Disorders Association

www.syeda.org.uk

Helpline: 0114 272 8855 (Tues & Thurs 10am – 5pm)

Email: info@syeda.org.uk

SYEDA gives information and advice and run support services for people with eating disorders and their 'carers'. By a carer they mean anyone who cares about someone with an eating disorder: family, friends, partners, colleagues etc.

Other Support and Information

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

BACP House

15 St John's Business Park

Lutterworth

Leicestershire LE17 4HB

Tel: 0870 443 5252 (Mon-Fri 8.45am-5.00pm)

E-mail: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Website: www.bacp.co.uk

BACP can provide a list of private counsellors in your area, plus information on counselling and choosing a counsellor. Please telephone or send an SAE to the above address. Alternatively, you can search for a counsellor at the website which, along with an online directory of counsellors, contains details about membership, training and an extensive publications list.

Careline

Cardinal Heenan Centre
326 High Road
Ilford IG1 1QP
Tel: 0845 122 8622 (Mon-Fri 10.00am-1.00pm and 7.00-10.00pm)
E-mail: info@carelineuk.org

Provides confidential telephone counselling for children, young people and adults on any issue including eating disorders, depression, loneliness, anxieties and phobias. The website has a forum and an online counselling portal.

Beat (formerly Eating Disorders Association)

103 Prince of Wales Road
Norwich NR1 1DW
Adult Helpline (18 yrs+): 0845 634 1414 (Mon-Fri 10.30am-8.30pm and Sat 1.00pm-4.30pm)
E-mail: help@b-eat.co.uk
Youthline (25yrs and under): 0845 634 7650 (Mon-Fri 4.30-8.30pm and Sat 1.00pm-4.30pm)
E-mail: fyp@b-eat.co.uk
Website: www.b-eat.co.uk

Campaigning organisation that provides information, advice and publications on all aspects of eating disorders. Operates a UK-wide telephone helpline and a youthline for information, help and support if you're aged 18 years and under. There is also a webzine, message board and chat room on the website.

Mental Health Foundation

9th Floor, Sea Containers House
20 Upper Ground
London SE1 9QB
Tel: 020 7803 1100
E-mail: mhf@mhf.org.uk
Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Working to improve the support available for people with mental health problems offering information and literature on all aspects of mental health. They are unable to offer advice on an individual basis.

Mind (National Association for Mental Health)

MindinfoLine, PO Box 277, Manchester, M60 3XN
Tel: 020 8519 2122
Mind Info Line: 0845 766 0163 (Mon-Fri 9am – 5pm)
E-mail: contact@mind.org.uk
Website: www.mind.org.uk

Campaigns for better mental health services in England and Wales and publishes a range of helpful books and leaflets. Contact them for details of your nearest local group or for more information.

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Aspect Court, 47 Park Square East
Leed, LS1 2NL

Tel: 0113 394 4107

E-mail: rcpsych@rcpsych.ac.uk or edavison@nyorkdiv.rcpsych.ac.uk

Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Offers public information leaflets and factsheets on mental health issues including depression, sleeping well, eating disorders, bereavement, social phobias and schizophrenia.

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

2nd Floor, Edward House

2 Wakley Street

London EC1V 7LT

Tel: 020 7014 9955 (Mon-Fri 9.00am-5.00pm)

E-mail: info@ukcp.org.uk

Website: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Umbrella group for over 5000 practitioners all registered through member organisations. Will provide lists of registered psychotherapists free of charge; the database can be searched by local area or other criteria such as wheelchair access or language spoken.

Young Minds

48-50 St John Street

London EC1M 4DG

Tel: 020 7336 8445 (Office only, Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm)

Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544 (Mon & Fri 9:30am -4pm)

E-mail: enquiries@youngminds.org.uk

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

Campaigning to improve mental health services for children and young people and providing information to anyone with concerns about the mental health or emotional wellbeing of a child or young person. They can give details of local and national advice agencies and leaflets for young people.

Youth Access

1-2 Taylors Yard

67 Alderbrook Road

London SW12 8AD

Helpline: 020 8772 9900 (Mon-Fri 9.30am-1.00pm, 2.00-5.30pm)

E-mail: admin@youthaccess.org.uk

Website: www.youthaccess.org.uk

Helpful Websites

Body Image Betrayal & Related Issues

www.bibri.com

This US-based website contains resources on eating disorders, plus details of chat rooms, range of links and suggested reading. Also has a section that suggests client/patient guidelines for evaluating therapy/counselling experience.

A national membership organisation for youth information, advice and counselling agencies. Provides details of and referrals to local youth agencies and counselling services for young people aged between 14 and 25, but does not offer direct advice.

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Eating Disorders Resources

<http://edr.org.uk/>

Informative website with resources on eating disorders including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, compulsive eating and binge eating, with details of organisations, publications and links to other websites.

National Centre for Eating Disorders

www.eating-disorders.org.uk

Aims to provide support for all eating problems, compulsive or binge eating, 'yo-yo' dieting, bulimia and anorexia. They offer information, counselling, and professional training.

Something Fishy

www.something-fishy.org

This American website raises awareness and offers support on eating disorders. Includes information about different types of eating disorders, signs to look out for, advice for helping loved ones and details of online support such as chat rooms. Also contains a treatment finder for the UK.

Support, Concern and Resources for Eating Disorders (SCaRED)

<http://scaredeatingdisorder.yuku.com>

A page devoted to providing discussion boards for different eating disorders and self-injury.

Women's Therapy Centre

www.womenstherapycentre.co.uk

Provides individual and group psychotherapy for women of all ages. Themes explored include compulsive eating and bulimia. Website contains information about the services and therapy available.

Reading

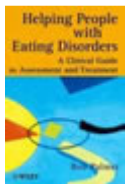


Getting Better Bit(e) by Bit(e) by Ulrike Schmidt, Janet Treasure (Psychology Press, 1993)

The aim of this self-help book is to empower sufferers to take control of their own lives and tackle their eating difficulties in their own home. It addresses the specific problems faced on a daily basis by bulimia sufferers and provides step-by-step advice for dealing with this condition.

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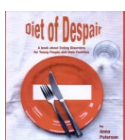
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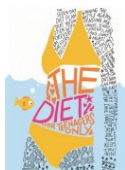
Helping People with Eating Disorders by Bob Palmer (John Wiley and Sons, 2000)
Useful resource for those interested in eating disorders and their treatment.



Treatment Manual for Anorexia Nervosa by J. Lock, D. Le Grange, W. S. Agras and C. Dare (Guilford Press, 2002)
Practical manual offering a step-by-step guide to the treatment of anorexia nervosa in adolescents, with family being the focus of the treatment.



Diet of Despair by A. Paterson (Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd, 2002) A book about eating disorders for young people and their families, written by a woman who suffered a serious eating disorder, and recovered.



The Diet for Teenagers Only By C. Wiatt and B. Schroeder (Harper Collins Ltd, 2005)
For teenagers who struggle with food and their weight, this book serves up fun, safe and inspirational ways for teenagers to be healthy &, where appropriate, lose weight, whilst helping them to love & respect their body.



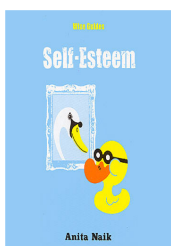
Helping Your Teenager Beat Depression by K. Manassis, MD (Woodbine House, Inc.2004)

A problem-solving approach for families that enables parents to become effective partners in the treatment of their child's depression, includes informative chapters around eating habits and control.



Helping Children Cope with Anxiety by J. Eckersley (Sheldon Press, 2006)

Looks at how the pressures of twenty-first-century living can affect children up to the age of 16, & what parents can do to help. Includes information on anorexia and eating disorders.



Wise Guides – Self-Esteem by A. Naik (Hodder Children's Books, 2005)

A book for young people. This essential guide provides you with lots of hints and tips on how to think positively about your friendships, your family, your body and your life.

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