

What is an Eating Disorder?

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Lots of people have different eating habits but just because you sometimes diet or sometimes eat too much doesn't mean you have a problem. It's when behaviour around food is more extreme that there may be an issue.

An eating disorder is a mental health illness where food is used to try and manage feelings. Sometimes eating disorders are triggered by worrying about body image but they can also be triggered when you are stressed, worried or when other areas of your life feel out of control. Being able to control what you eat can give you back that feeling of order.

There are many of different types of eating disorder including:

Anorexia Nervosa – when you try to keep your weight as low as possible by not eating enough food, by exercising too much, or both

Bulimia – when you regularly eat too much at one time and then make yourself sick. Bulimics might also use laxatives or exercise too much

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) – when you often eat far too much, feel physically uncomfortable and then feel really guilty

Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) – when your symptoms don't match any of the other disorders exactly, but you may still have a very serious problem

EDNOS is the most common eating disorder (though most people have not even heard of it) and anorexia is the least common (though nearly everyone knows about it).

Some of the signs of a possible eating disorder can include:

- Losing your appetite
- Eating, even when you are not hungry
- Being obsessed with your body image
- Following fad diets or only eating certain foods
- Losing or gaining weight dramatically
- Being afraid of gaining weight
- Making yourself sick after eating
- Hiding food
- Finding it difficult to eat in social situations
- Being secretive around food

Focussing on buying and cooking food for other people

Even if you have one or more of these symptoms it doesn't mean you definitely have an eating disorder but, if they are affecting your everyday life, you should definitely go and talk to a doctor.

An eating disorder is when you have an unhealthy attitude to food, which can take over your life and make you ill. It can be extremely dangerous and help should be sought as soon as possible.



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