



I'M WORRIED ABOUT SOMEONE WITH AN EATING DISORDER

A guide for young people

beateatingdisorders.org.uk

WHAT IS AN EATING DISORDER?

Eating disorders are mental illnesses. They aren't the same as changing your diet – they can take over someone's life and the lives of those around them. While unhealthy eating behaviour is involved, they aren't all about food. We don't know for sure why people develop eating disorders, but for some people they are about feeling in control or coping with something else. People with eating disorders are often secretive about their eating and may feel guilty and ashamed. All eating disorders are very serious, and everyone who has one deserves care and support. The good news is that **recovery is possible**.

In this guide, we'll talk about different eating disorders and the treatment someone might have. It's not possible to tell whether someone has an eating disorder just by looking at them.

They differ from person to person – there are common signs, but someone with an eating disorder doesn't have to have them all. This is part of why eating disorders can be hard to spot, and it may take some time before someone is officially diagnosed.

There's lots more information at beateatingdisorders.org.uk

WHAT IS ANOREXIA?

People with **anorexia** may restrict (eating very little food), or binge (eating lots of food all at once and feeling that this is out of control) and then exercise or make themselves sick to try and get rid of the food they have eaten. Someone with anorexia is likely to be a lower weight than expected for their age and height.

Signs may include:

- Worry about gaining weight.
- Not seeing their body the way you do.
- Being secretive about their eating.
- Doing lots of extra exercise.
- Feeling dizzy or faint.
- Wearing baggy clothes to hide their body shape.
- Feeling cold.
- Isolating themselves from others.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/anorexia

WHAT IS ARFID?

ARFID stands for “**avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder**”, where someone avoids certain foods or limits how much they eat. This can be for a number of reasons, for example, they might be sensitive to certain tastes or textures, have had a bad experience with food, or not be interested in eating due to other reasons. These behaviours might impact someone’s social, personal, or work life. Unlike other eating disorders, it is not related to worries about weight or shape.

Signs may include:

- Eating a range of foods, but less than is needed to stay healthy.
- Taking a long time over mealtimes.
- Trying to avoid social events where there might be food.
- Feeling anxious at mealtimes, for example, people might chew very carefully or take small sips and bites.
- People may not be getting the nutrients their body needs, and so may develop deficiencies.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/ARFID

WHAT IS BINGE EATING DISORDER?

People with **binge eating disorder** may binge on a regular basis. Bingeing isn’t just eating a bit more than usual, it involves eating large amounts of food, or what someone feels is a large amount. People may eat faster than they usually do, or until they are uncomfortably full. People feel out of control when bingeing, and often describe that it is difficult to stop. Binges might be planned in advance or happen in the moment, and usually happen in secret. Someone might feel “better” while bingeing, but afterwards they’ll feel guilty and anxious about what has just happened. Their way to cope with this may be to plan their next binge.

Signs may include:

- Eating in secret.
- Hiding food packaging.
- Gaining weight.
- Spending lots of money on food.
- Self-conscious about eating in front of others.
- Loss of confidence and low self-esteem.
- Isolating themselves from others.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/bed

WHAT IS BULIMIA?

People with **bulimia** may binge (eating lots of food at once and feeling that this out of control) and then purge. This is when people make themselves sick, exercise excessively, or take laxatives because they feel guilty about what they've eaten, worry about their bingeing, or because their stomach is so painful. Often someone with bulimia will stay a "normal" weight, which can make it hard to spot.

Signs may include:

- Secrecy around food.
- Exercising lots more than usual.
- Going to the toilet after meals.
- Isolating themselves from others.
- Poor skin.
- Scars on fingers, knuckles, or backs of hands, and bad breath from being sick.
- Feeling bad about their body image.
- Possible changes in weight

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/bulimia

WHAT IS OSFED?

OSFED stands for "**other specified feeding or eating disorder**". If someone is diagnosed with OSFED, it means that their symptoms don't quite fit with what doctors expect of anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder, though it is just as serious. OSFED is an umbrella term, and so people may also be diagnosed with a subtype of the condition. Signs can include any of those mentioned above.

Learn more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk/osfed

For more information about eating disorders and what to look for if you're worried about someone, head to beateatingdisorders.org.uk/types or scan the QR code below.



WHY DOES SOMEONE GET AN EATING DISORDER?

We don't know the exact answer, but research is leading to better understanding. We know it could be down to someone's genetics or biology – there's lots of research into how the brain works that's starting to tell us more.

Eating disorders can be triggered by other factors too. These might be big life events, like moving house or school, parents splitting up, or someone close to the person passing away. They could be things like stress from schoolwork or trouble with their friendship group.

Alongside this, people may also experience pressure from classmates, social media, and things like adverts, that can make them feel worse, or worry about the way they look and feel the need to change.

Anyone of any age, gender or background can have an eating disorder

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH AN EATING DISORDER?

Depending on their eating disorder and other factors, a person may need to see their doctor, school nurse or other healthcare professional to access treatment.

Treatment will look different for people depending on their age, the type of eating disorder they have, and whether they have any other conditions. It will usually include a type of psychological therapy, that might be with the person themselves, or could include their family too.

People will typically be treated as an outpatient and attend appointments, but sometimes they may need inpatient treatment, and during this they will usually stay in the hospital full time.

Full recovery from eating disorders is possible

HOW CAN I HELP?

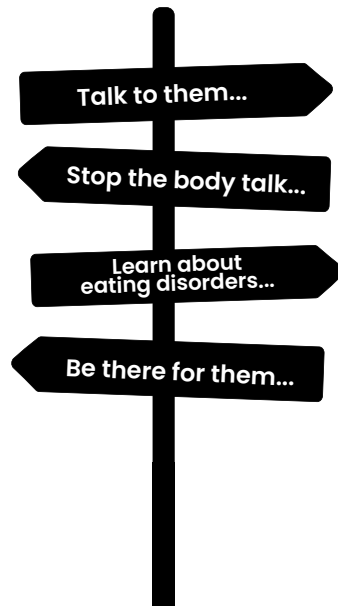
Eating disorders don't just affect the person involved but their family and friends too. Here are some ways you can help:

- 1.** Talk to them. Ask if things are okay, if there's anything they want to talk about, and if there's anything that would help. Remember, they are still a person and more than just their eating disorder.
- 2.** Learn about eating disorders. Having knowledge can help you understand why the person is behaving like they are, and lets them know you care. Beat's website contains lots of information about eating disorders.
- 3.** Stop the body talk. We can all be guilty of talking about body shape and weight, but it can be an extra sensitive subject for someone with an eating disorder.
- 4.** Make sure they know you're always there to listen and support them. But don't feel you have to make every conversation about their eating disorder. It can be helpful to both of you to take your minds off things with the same conversations you'd usually have.

When you care about someone, it's understandable to want to fix things. Remember eating disorders are complicated, and your friend or family member might need support from doctors to get better.

Sometimes the person doesn't think they need help or just isn't ready to talk. Remember that's not the person you know but the eating disorder taking over.

Trust your instincts – if you're worried, tell a parent or another trusted adult what's going on.



DON'T FORGET TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Supporting someone with an eating disorder can be exhausting. It's important to look after yourself too, because you can't help them if you are not well yourself.

Lots of people who know someone who is suffering with an eating disorder feel worried and upset.

Here are some ways you can take care of yourself:

- 1.** Take time for yourself: relax and spend time with people who care about you.
- 2.** Write about what's happening in a diary, or creatively through poetry or music.
- 3.** Make sure there's someone you can talk to, like a trusted adult. You can also call, email or DM our Helpline.

THE EATING DISORDER IS CHANGING EVERYTHING

It's natural to feel negative emotions about the eating disorder. You might feel it's taking over everything – your relationship with the person and other people around you. If it's your brother or sister, it might seem like your parents are focusing all their attention on them. If it's your parent, it can be really hard to know what to do or say. But remember if it's not your fault, and it's normal to feel confused or upset. Don't keep these feelings bottled up – talk about them.

Eating disorders can make people seem different and not like themselves. It can be very hard to see a sibling, parent or friend change, get angry or upset – but remember, that's the eating disorder talking.

Even though things can get very difficult, remember the person isn't doing any of this deliberately, and with the right treatment and support they can get better.



GLOSSARY

There are lots of medical terms you might hear about eating disorders. We've explained some of them below.

Antidepressants: Medicine used to reduce symptoms of depression. A doctor might (but not always) prescribe these to someone with an eating disorder, but they shouldn't be the only treatment.

BMI: Body mass index is a measure that is used to estimate whether you are a healthy weight for your height.

CAMHS: "Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services" – specialist mental health services for children and young people, usually up to the age of 18, but this can vary depending on the area.

CAT: Cognitive analytical treatment is a therapy used to treat eating disorders. A therapist will work with a person to help make positive changes. Sometimes it will look at how someone has coped with problems in the past.

CBT: Cognitive behavioural therapy is one therapy used to treat eating disorders.

It helps people link thoughts, feelings and actions with their eating disorder behaviours.

Day patient: If someone is a day patient, they might visit the hospital during the day and then go home at night before returning again.

Diagnosis: A doctor will look at someone's signs and symptoms and give them a diagnosis. Eating disorder diagnoses might include anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder or OFSED.

Eating disorder service: Someone with an eating disorder may be treated in an eating disorder service. These can be services for all ages, or for children and young people, or adults.

ECG: Electrocardiograms are a test that record the activity of the heart.

Electrolytes: Vitamins and minerals in the blood often measured or monitored with a blood test.

Family therapy: Family therapy involves the whole family and not just the individual with an eating disorder.

GLOSSARY

Guided self-help: This is a type of treatment that uses self-help materials with support from a professional to follow a programme.

Inpatient: If someone is an inpatient they will stay in hospital full time. Sometimes this can be over weeks or months.

Mental Health Act: If a doctor thinks someone is too unwell to make decisions about treatment, or if someone refuses treatment, they can be treated under the Mental Health Act, which means someone else will make decisions about their care.

Outpatient: Someone who attends hospital appointments but doesn't have to stay overnight.

Section: If someone is sectioned, they are being treated under the Mental Health Act.

OTHER SUPPORT AVAILABLE

actionforchildren.org.uk - Action for Children work with and support young carers across the UK, providing practical and emotional support.

barnardos.org.uk - Barnardo's runs 20 services across the UK, which work to support young carers and their families in a variety of ways. Search for their services online.

childline.org.uk - Childline is a free, private and confidential service to help anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through. You can contact a Childline counsellor by phone 0800 1111 or get in touch via online chat or email.

themix.org.uk - The Mix offer support to anyone aged 13 to 25. You can chat with people going through similar experiences to you online or speak to one of their advisors online or by free phone 0808 808 4994.



SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Our Helplines are here for anyone affected by an eating disorder.

England:

0808 801 0677

help@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Northern Ireland:

0808 801 0434

NIhelp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Scotland:

0808 801 0432

Scotlandhelp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Wales:

0808 801 0433

Waleshelp@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

For more information about our Helplines head to beateatingdisorders.org.uk/help or scan the QR code below.




IF OUR HELPLINE IS CLOSED

If our Helpline is closed, you can also DM us on social media for advice and we will get back to you when we're open.

Our website is also a good place to look for support and information. We have lots of information, resources and stories from people who have recovered from an eating disorder. Visit our website at beateatingdisorders.org.uk or scan the QR code for support and information.



Contact us on social media

 @beatedsupport

 /beat.eating.disorders

 /beated

FIND OUT MORE

Learn more about what we do at
beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

General enquiries:

0300 123 3355

info@beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Use helpfinder.beateatingdisorders.org.uk
to find services in your area.

As a charity, we rely heavily on fundraising and charitable donations to fund our vital support services, including our print and downloadable resources which we supply free of charge. To find more about how you can support us please visit www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/support-our-work/ or call 01603 753308.

Version 1 - Printed September 2024.

A charity registered in England and Wales (801343) and Scotland (SC039309).
Company limited by guarantee no 2368495.



**SCAN ME FOR
MORE INFO**