



EATING

DISORDERS

Explains what eating problems are as well as possible reasons people have problems with eating. Includes ways you can manage eating problems as well as some useful exercises, and some other resources and websites for further support.

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What is an eating problem?

An eating problem is essentially a relationship with food that you find difficult.

Everyone eats differently and has a different relationship with foods but if the way you eat or do not eat is taking over your life, you could have an eating problem.

It is not unusual for eating habits to change slightly, one day you might feel really hungry and another day not so much. But if these changes are drastic like you're focusing a lot on controlling what and how much you are eating or if you make yourself sick after eating these are signs you might have a problem.

Regardless of your age, weight, gender, anyone can develop an eating problem.

What might having an eating problem look like?

It can be different for everyone, here are some of troubling eating behaviours you might be experiencing:

- Making yourself sick after eating
- Losing your appetite/feeling nauseas around food
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Eating when not hungry
- Feeling you need to be secretive about eating.
- Stick to a rigid set of diet rules.
- Check and weigh your body often.
- Feeling very anxious about having to eat/digest food.
- Excessively exercise to keep weight off after eating.
- Obsessive about your body and the effect food has on it.
- Avoiding socialising when you think food will be involved.

How can having an eating problem affect me?

Aside from experiencing the food related symptoms of an eating problem you may also find it can have different physical symptoms. For example, you may experience:

- Feeling cold, tired, or dizzy
- Pains, tingling or numbness.
- Heart racing
- Feeling faint
- Digestive problems
- Weight issues
- Intrusion with your period and other signs of puberty

Eating problems aren't just about the food and physical symptoms, it can also result in you experiencing some strong feelings- these may be hard to express or resolve. Sometimes by focusing on food it is a way of us hiding these negative feelings and issues, even from yourself.

For example, you may feel:

- Low, struggle with low periods of sadness
- Anxious, on edge or easily overwhelmed.
- Tired a lot of the time.
- Shameful, or guilty like you've done something wrong.
- Afraid of other people finding out and what they will think.
 - Angry, e.g., angry at yourself for having an eating problem and/or angry at how you are/look so you create an eating problem.

Experiencing all these intense feelings and symptoms can be a lot to handle and it's likely that it will take its toll on you and potentially stop you from doing things you usually enjoy or find it makes some tasks harder.

Because of this, having an eating problem can interfere with our everyday tasks as well as affect some of our relationships with other people.



How can having an eating problem affect me?

An eating problem may

- Make it hard for you to concentrate on your work/studies.
- Make it hard for you to carry out everyday tasks and events.
- Take over your head and mean that thinking about food and controlling it is all you can think about/becomes the most important thing in your life.
- Stop you from being able to be spontaneous to try somewhere new or to travel at all.
- You become a lot more focused on your appearance and any changes that have come.
- Cause others to make comments/ask questions and in some cases bully about food and eating.
- Start making you avoid social situations just to avoid having to eat in front of other people.
- If struggling with physical effects like feeling tired and low, you may have to take days off of work/school.

In regard to our relationships with others, having an eating problem might:

- Distance yourself from loved ones, those who do not know how you feel or those that feel do not understand.
- Cause those that do know focus a lot on what having an eating problem can have on your body.
- You might feel paranoid that they are always watching you when you are eating.
- Make it uncomfortable when sometimes people comment on your appearance, especially if it has drastically changed.

How can I help manage my eating problem?

Talk to people you trust

Having an eating problem can feel very isolating and you may find it hard to talk to people about it.

If you do have a partner, friend, family member that you feel you can trust and talk to about this then it can be really helpful to be able to share your troubles with your eating problem. It's good to not always look for solutions from your loved one and more just be happy you have someone that can listen.

If you are finding it hard to talk about your eating problem or feel you don't have anyone you can trust it can be helpful to write down your feelings as a way of getting them out, its also useful for being able to look back at how you felt about certain things about your eating problem.

Talk to people that are going through similar problems.

There are a lot of feelings around having an eating problem, and there may be certain aspects of having an eating problem that loved ones maybe don't understand as much.

That's why it can be good to look for some peer support. If you don't feel comfortable talking 1-1 with someone who's been through similar problems, there are blogs that have been posted of peoples experiences and how they managed their eating problems that you could start with. If you do feel like you could talk to someone there are lots of organisations that can help you find some peer support either online or face-to-face.

- Beat
- Overeaters Anonymous
- Student minds
- Mind, Side by Side

Learn to manage triggers and warning signs

This is where writing down your experiences can be really useful as it can help you identify your triggers and warning signs for your problem. **Some examples of situations where you might feel more at risk of struggling with your eating problem:**

- Loosing or gaining weight
- Changes of shape happening to your body.
- In times of high stress e.g., exams, relationship breakdown, moving.
- Going on a diet
- Going on holiday

It's also a good idea to get familiar with some of your warning signs, for example:

- Starting to eat too much/little.
- Feelings about purging
- Thinking about food
- Weighing yourself more often
- Spending longer periods checking your body

When trying to manage your eating problems its important to be gentle with yourself and not judge yourself too harshly if you do relapse into bad behaviour it can take time to be able to manage an eating problem effectively and often relapses happen. The good thing to do is try and learn something from each relapse which might give you more insight about your problem.

Try and alter unhealthy routines.

It's easy when you have an eating problem to get into bad routines around food and eating habits. These can be very hard to break but making little changes can help to start the change.

- If you are worried about overeating, having a shopping list with ingredients for set meals and snacks.
- If you find you are focusing too much on your body/weight try and distract yourself e.g., do a hobby you enjoy, write, draw, listen to music, snap a band on your wrist.
- Use your distractions techniques after eating to try and keep you distracted from thinking about purging.
- When thinking about yourself and goals, try and focus on some positive goals you want to reach that aren't related to food or weight e.g., start/finish a course, work goals, learn a new hobby.

Monitor what you're looking at online

Looking online can be a great resource, there's tonnes of advice, tips and other peoples stories to inspire and help you manage your eating problem. However, being online for too long or looking at certain things can end up being triggering for you- especially social media. Sometimes spending too much time on social media can be damaging especially if you are starting to look up and compare other people's bodies with your own. Some good things to focus on are:

- Remembering that photos can be altered, tweaked, and manipulated to make the person look a certain way. Lots of people on social media use photoshop and filters to change their appearance.
- Be conscious of how much time you are spending online.
- Change your social media feeds, unfollow certain people if you need to. If you are finding looking at certain accounts is starting to trigger you, then unfollow them if you need to.
- It is okay to take a break from social media. If you feel it has been harming for you recently then take a bit of a break or cut down the amount of time you are spending on these sites.
 - If looking online, block or avoid any websites or accounts that promote bad eating habits or eating disorders.
- Try and follow more positive inspirational accounts online filled with body positivity and eating problem recovery communities.

Practise self-care

Being kind to yourself and giving yourself what you need is also important. Self-care is incredibly personal and its important to practise self-care that works for you and makes you feel good.

Some general examples of good self-care are:

- Practise mindfulness/meditation
- Listen to your favourite song/watch favourite film.
- Get outside and soak up nature.
- Put fresh sheets on your bed/tidy your room.
- Write or draw.
- Have a long shower/bath.
- Make something without caring if its good
- Read a book/poem/letter

Helpful Information

APPS:

Recovery Record: This app was developed by a team of psychologists and engineers to be the best app for the management of eating disorders.

Rise Up & Recover: This app is meant for anyone with food, dieting, exercise and/or body image issues.

Gratitude: Happiness Journal- This app helps you think about the small things in life and to be grateful for every day. You can track your thoughts and see how they ebb and flow over time.

Nourishly: This app was made by the same people as Recovery Record but is a little bit different. The main focus of Nourishly is healthy eating and healthy thought patterns around food.

Woebot: Woebot is your “self-care expert” built by a group of psychologists who worked at Stanford University for over 10 years. They left their jobs on a mission to make mental healthcare more accessible worldwide.

Websites Mind

Beat: Offers information and support for anybody affected by an eating disorder. <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

Anorexia and Bulimia Care: Offers support for anyone affected by eating disorders <https://www.anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk/>

The Mix: Offers support to anyone under 25 about anything that’s troubling them. <https://www.themix.org.uk/>

YoungMinds: Crisis manager, provides free 24/7 text support for young people experiencing mental health crisis. <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/get-urgenthelpp/youngminds-crisis-messenger/>

YouthAccess: Provides information about local counselling and advice for young people ages 12-25 <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/>

Weigh concern: Charity works to address both the physical and psychological health needs of overweight people. www.weightconcern.org.uk

Eating disorders support: lots of signposting and more information about eating disorders. <http://www.eatingdisorderssupport.co.uk/help/links-resources>

Student Minds: Mental health charity that supports students. studentminds.org.uk

Mind: Mental health charity for everyone. <https://www.mind.org.uk/>