

Eating Disorders

What is an Eating Disorder? We all have different ways of eating and many of these 'eating styles' allow us to remain healthy. However, some are driven by body shape and weight concerns (eg an intense fear of being at a healthy weight or becoming fat) and can upset body functioning and daily activities. These are called eating disorders and are often a way of coping with difficult experiences and emotions. They are described below:

Anorexia and Bulimia. Anorexia and bulimia are serious mental health conditions that need professional help to diagnose and treat. Both are eating disorders and can lead to other physical and emotional problems.

People with **anorexia nervosa** have an extreme fear of gaining weight. They feel fat even when they have lost so much weight that it becomes obvious to others. They may starve themselves by only eating tiny quantities of food. They become so preoccupied with their weight and shape, and so distorted in their thinking about food, that it is very difficult for them to accept the need to eat a proper diet. They may exercise vigorously or use laxatives.

People with **bulimia nervosa** eat large amounts of food in binges and then make themselves sick to get rid of the food. They may also take large amounts of laxatives. They may not look overweight or underweight, and because of this their eating problems are often difficult to detect. Continuous bingeing and vomiting can eventually do serious harm to their bodies.

Recognising eating problems. It can be hard for parents to know if a young person has an eating problem or disorder. Below are some signs of difficulty which need to be taken seriously:

- Regularly skipping meals and obsessively counting calories
- Eating only low calorie food
- Showing a keen interest in buying or cooking food for others
- Wearing very loose clothes to hide the body
- An obsession with exercise
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Disappearing from the table directly after meals (in order to make themselves vomit)
- Saying they are unhappy with their body
- Food missing in large amounts from the kitchen.

Despite these signs, however, many young people may deny they have a problem. They may try to keep it a secret, and find it difficult to accept they need help.

Family and friends can do a lot to support a young person with an eating disorder, particularly by talking to them about their feelings and everyday problems. Young people unwilling to accept help from their parents may find it easier to talk to somebody at school.

If you would like more information or support around eating disorders, please contact Caroline Hunt, Student Welfare Officer who is able to discuss this in more depth with you.

Getting help

If you think your child is having difficulties with food or eating, it is important to seek help at an early stage, to give them the best chance to sort out the issues before more serious problems such as anorexia or bulimia develop.

[Eating Disorders Service, Truro, Cornwall 01872 221434](#), Monday – Friday 9am -5pm.

www.youngminds.org.uk Young people's mental health and wellbeing.

www.savvykernow.org.uk Friendly advice and a guide to Young People Friendly Services in Cornwall.

www.KOOTH.com Free online support for young people that provides access to on-line counselling and forums.