

Eating Disorders FAQ's

(Thank you to Eating Disorders Victoria for compiling this information)

What is disordered eating and why is it dangerous?

'Disordered eating' refers to a wide range of abnormal eating behaviours, many of which are shared with diagnosed eating disorders. The main thing differentiating disordered eating from an eating disorder is the level of severity and frequency of behaviours.

Disordered eating behaviours can include skipping meals and losing weight; compulsively exercising; thinking you're fat when you are not; binge eating; becoming withdrawn; vomiting after eating; and appearing depressed, anxious, irritable or moody.

Becoming obsessively restrictive around any particular food groups or types of food, including sugar, can be problematic as it may place someone at risk of developing an eating disorder. Sometimes people start by restricting one type of food, then another and another, until their approach to food becomes extremely restrictive and uncompromising. This can be dangerous and the sign of someone becoming unwell.

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is characterised when eating, exercise and body weight/shape become an unhealthy preoccupation of someone's life. It is a very serious mental illness, and can have harmful effects on someone's physical, emotional and psychological health.

Eating disorders include Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder as well as other combinations of disorders.

What are some warning signs that someone might be becoming obsessive in their approach to being healthy?

There are a number of different signs that someone might have or be at risk of developing an eating disorder. These include (but are by no means limited to):

- ❖ Constant or repetitive dieting, counting calories, skipping meals or avoidance of entire food groups
- ❖ Binge eating, hiding or hoarding food
- ❖ Vomiting or laxative abuse
- ❖ Compulsive exercise
- ❖ Negative or distorted body image
- ❖ Avoidance of social situations involving food, or avoidance of meals by giving excuses
- ❖ Having a strong focus on body shape and weight, or engaging in body checking activities such as pinching waist, repeated weighing
- ❖ Intense fear of gaining weight
- ❖ Deceptive behaviour around food
- ❖ Sudden or rapid changes in weight
- ❖ Fainting or dizziness
- ❖ Depression, anxiety, moodiness or irritability
- ❖ Sensitive to comments about body shape, eating or exercise
- ❖ Feelings of life being 'out of control'

Please note that any combination of the above symptoms can be present in an eating disorder, because no one eating disorder is exactly the same as another. It is also possible for a person to demonstrate several of these signs and not have an eating disorder.

I'm worried about a friend; they have become obsessive with their approach to food and exercise and I don't know how to talk to them about it. What can I do?

If you think that someone you know might have an eating disorder, it is important to raise your concerns with them as early intervention is the best way to assist with successful recovery. Think about who might be the best person to raise the concerns. In most cases this will be someone who cares about the person, who can provide them with ongoing support, and who sees them regularly.

Before you approach someone, educate yourself. You are more likely to be able to express that you understand what the person is going through if you are well-informed. Be calm, honest, caring and open about your concerns. Come straight to the point and have examples to back up your concerns. Tell the person that you have observed behaviour that worries you.

Try to avoid the following: comments about appearance, weight or food; naming other people who are also worried; demanding change or berating the person; power struggles; tricking or forcing the person to eat; labelling statements, blaming statements or judgemental language.

If you are concerned that the person is in immediate physical danger, or at risk of harming themselves, then get immediate advice from a health practitioner, call an ambulance, take them to emergency, or call an emergency support line such as Lifeline (13 11 14).

For more support, please see EDV's factsheets:

<http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/eating-disorders/edv-fact-sheets>

How can I find out more?

Eating Disorders Victoria offers services along the whole spectrum of support (from awareness-raising through to clinical services and recovery support) to thousands of people every year. We respond to each person's individual needs, often being the first point of contact for someone in their journey towards recovery.

To find out more, please visit the EDV website (www.eatingdisorders.org.au) or call the Helpline on 1300 550 236 (Mon-Fri, 9:30am-5pm).

What other services and information is available?

The Butterfly Foundation

National Helpline: 1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)

Email: support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

Web-chat: <http://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au/web-counselling/>

National Eating Disorders Collaboration

www.nedc.com.au