

Eating disorders

An eating disorder is when you have an unhealthy attitude towards food.

It can involve:

- eating too much
- eating too little
- becoming obsessed with your weight and body shape

There are treatments that can help. You can recover from an eating disorder.

Men and women of any age can get an eating disorder. It usually develops first in the teenage years.

Types of eating disorders

The most common eating disorders are:

- [anorexia nervosa](#)
- [bulimia](#)
- [binge eating disorder \(BED\)](#)
- other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED)

How to know if you have an eating disorder

If you have an unhealthy relationship with food that's affecting your eating habits, this is usually a sign of an eating disorder.

Symptoms of eating disorders include:

- spending a lot of time worrying about your weight and body shape
- avoiding socialising that involves food
- eating very little food
- making yourself sick or taking laxatives after you eat
- exercising too much
- having very strict habits or routines around food
- changes in your mood

You may also notice physical signs, including:

- feeling cold, tired or dizzy
- problems with your digestion
- your weight being very high or very low for someone of your age and height
- [not getting your period](#) (for women and girls)

Warning signs of an eating disorder in someone else

It's difficult to tell if someone close to you has developed an eating disorder.

Warning signs to look out for include:

- dramatic weight loss
- lying about how much and when they've eaten, or how much they weigh
- eating a lot of food very fast
- going to the bathroom a lot after eating, often returning looking flushed
- exercising too much
- avoiding eating with others
- cutting food into small pieces or eating very slowly
- wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss

Getting help for an eating disorder

If you think you may have an eating disorder, see your GP as soon as you can.

Your GP will ask you questions about your eating habits and how you're feeling. They'll also do a full health check.

If you have an eating disorder, your GP should refer you to an eating disorder specialist.

It's hard to admit you have a problem and ask for help. It may make things easier if you bring a friend or loved one with you to your appointment.

Getting help for someone else

Someone with an eating disorder might be secretive and defensive about eating and weight.

It can be difficult to know what to do if you're concerned for them.

Let them know you're worried about them and encourage them to see their GP. You could offer to go along with them.

Treatment for eating disorders

You can recover from an eating disorder, but it may take time. Recovery will be different for everyone.

The specialist will talk to you about any support you might need and include this in your treatment plan.

Treatment depends on the type of eating disorder you have. It will usually involve some kind of talking therapy.

You may need regular health checks if it is having an impact on your physical health.

Guided self-help programmes can help with bulimia and binge eating.

Most people have one-to-one therapy but group therapy may also be an option.

Learn more about [talking therapies](#)

What causes eating disorders?

We do not know exactly what causes eating disorders.

You may be more likely to get an eating disorder if:

- you or a member of your family has a history of eating disorders, depression, or alcohol or drug addiction
- you're criticised for your eating habits, body shape or weight
- you're overly-concerned with being slim
- you have anxiety, low self-esteem, an obsessive personality, or are a perfectionist
- you've been sexually abused
- you've been bullied

Visit bodywhys.ie for information and support about eating disorders.

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