

EATING PROBLEMS

TALK TO US

OFF THE RECORD

WHAT ARE EATING PROBLEMS AND ITS CAUSES?

We all need food to survive and therefore eating plays an important part in our lives. The relationship we have with food may differ from time to time due to a variety of different factors. However, if you have an eating problem your relationship with food is likely to be more complex, which can have a big impact on your physical and emotional health. In fact, it is often underlying feelings, not food, that is the starting point of an eating problem.

An eating problem can be diagnosed as a mental health illness or eating disorder. Some types of eating disorders are: Anorexia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorder, Bulimia Nervosa, Other specified feeding or eating disorder (OSFED) and Pica.

Research shows that there is no single cause for eating problems. The development of an eating disorders can be very complex and personal to an individual. Some of the factors that can make someone more vulnerable to developing an eating disorder are:

- Peer pressure
- Experiences dating back to childhood
- Lack of confidence in yourself
- Bereavement
- Family problems
- Other life-changing events

I don't want anybody to find out about my eating habits

HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S AN EATING DISORDER?

If you have an eating disorder, you've probably become preoccupied with both your weight and your food. You may have also noticed changes in your weight and mood.

Anorexia

- Not allowing yourself to eat the right amount of food needed to stay at a healthy weight.
- Feel like eating is the same as losing control
- A high or sense of achievement if you don't eat and/or over-exercising.
- Like you can't think about anything other than food.

Binge Eating Disorder

- Feeling like you cannot stop yourself from eating.
- Health problems associated with gaining weight.

Bulimia

- Eating large amounts of food and then later intentionally making yourself sick because of feelings of shame and guilt.
- Being dehydrated which causes bad skin.
- Going from being overweight to underweight quite often.
- Feeling ashamed and guilty every time you eat
- Feeling like you're constantly stuck in a cycle of being out of control and trying to get control back.

Pica

- Eating or craving things that are not considered food.

I can't stop looking at my body in the mirror

WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE

If you have a complex relationship with food, you may notice a number of signs, such as:

- Cutting out food that you once enjoyed.
- Becoming withdrawn from others.
- Avoiding meal times with family or eating out with friends.
- Overanalysing food labels or counting calories.
- You may find yourself lying or evading questions around body weight, food consumption and exercising.
- Your self-worth maybe influenced by how you perceive your body shape and weight.
- You may experience low mood or other mental health illnesses such as depression, anxiety and thoughts of self-harm.

My eating makes me feel like I am in control

WAYS TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Eating problems are treatable but if left untreated they can be fatal and can develop into major health problems. If you think you may have an eating disorder then it is important to try and talk to someone quickly as eating problems tend to become more serious over time.

- **Professional help** - Ring your local GP and arrange to see them as soon as possible. You might be referred to a specialist service in order to receive the treatment you need.
- **Talk to close ones** – There are resources online which can guide you on how to open up to people about eating problems. Share resources with them so they can educate themselves and be of better support to you.
- **Emotional support** - If you're feeling overwhelmed with emotions and need someone to talk to, you can get in touch with support services such as Beat (0808 801 0677) and Samaritans (116 123).
- **Support groups** - Talking to other people who might be going through similar experiences. You can share ideas of what helps you to cope and manage difficult feelings and receive support and ideas for coping too.
- Pay attention to how social media accounts you follow might trigger bad thoughts about yourself. Unfollow them or take social media breaks if it gets too much.
- Avoid websites and social media accounts that promote disordered eating. Follow accounts which promote body positivity, self-acceptance and recovery.
- You can download apps such as Rise Up Recovery Warriors, to access tools to help you in conjunction with professional support.