



## Eating disorders

### What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are often caused of feelings of intense unhappiness and depression. Developing an eating disorder can also be a sign that a young person has a complex relationship with their self-image. They may perceive that they allow them to gain some control over their emotions in a physical way, when in fact eating disorders are actually very harmful physically and emotionally. Having an eating disorder is a sign that a young person needs support with coping with things in life and working through emotional difficulties.

Eating disorders are complex and not all signs and symptoms will apply to all young people suffering from them. There are a number of different eating disorders as well as signs that they might be suffering from one or more of them:

### Anorexia nervosa:

#### Physical symptoms:

- Severe weight loss
- Periods stopping in girls (amenorrhoea)
- Hormonal changes in boys
- Stomach pains
- Constipation
- Dizziness
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Feeling cold constantly

#### Behaviours:

- Lying about having eaten meals
- Needing to control a situation
- Being in denial that there is an issue
- Wearing baggy clothes to disguise weight loss or perceived weight gain
- Fixation with exercising excessively
- Isolating themselves and wanting to be alone

Counselling Appointments line: 0118 901 5668

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Emotional signs:

- Intense and irrational fear of gaining weight
- Having an obsession with dieting and portion control
- Having a distorted view of their shape and size, often not based in reality
- Experiencing guilt after eating
- Preoccupation with food
- Feeling guilty when they eat
- Depressive symptoms

**Bulimia nervosa:**

Physical symptoms:

- Suffering sore throats and swollen glands
- Experiencing issues with their teeth such as sensitivity and enamel damage
- Stomach pains
- Getting mouth infections
- Irregular periods in girls
- Extremely dry skin

Behaviours:

- Eating large quantities of food in a single sitting
- Purging and vomiting after eating
- Secretive behaviour to “cover their tracks”
- Excessive abuse of laxatives

Emotional signs:

- Feeling guilty after eating
- Feeling intense shame and guilt for their actions
- Feeling out of control and powerless to stop
- Suffering serious mood swings

**Binge Eating Disorder (BED):**

Physical symptoms:

- Weight gain

Behaviours:

- Eating large quantities of food
- Being secretive about their eating
- Eating inappropriate and unhealthy foods

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Emotional signs:

- Feeling guilty after eating
- Feeling ashamed and depressed
- Suffering intense mood swings
- Feeling powerless

They may also be suffering from EDNOS; an 'eating disorder not otherwise specified'. This means they may meet some but not all the diagnostic criteria for the above types of eating disorder, but do have disordered eating habits and emotional issues going on.

### **What causes eating disorders?**

When suffering from an eating disorder it may actually be a young person's underlying emotional issues and distress that are the catalysts for developing one, rather than the root issue being food itself.

When a young person transitions from childhood and enters puberty or pre-pubescence, their bodies change and develop in new and sometimes overwhelming ways. These changes can be hard to come to terms with and adjust to. As a result of this, eating disorders are much more common in young people going through such huge image and life changes including how they look and feel about ourselves.

Developing unhealthy eating patterns or dieting excessively when young can lead to more extreme disorders that might be used as a way to exert some control over their lives, or as a means to help them cope with stressful and upsetting times they face at this age. These can include exam stress, family breakdowns, bullying, friendship issues, and issues with dating and sex.

Eating disorders are commonly associated with young women, but increasingly, young men are also becoming more susceptible to developing a disorder.

### **Getting help**

It can be very difficult for a young person to get better on their own once they are in the grip of an eating disorder, so it is very important to seek professional help as soon as possible. Remember, that in the extreme, people do die from eating disorders. None of us want our loved ones to suffer in this way.

Doctors will assess a young person's physical condition and refer them for appropriate help depending on the issues they are suffering. This can include seeing psychiatrists, psychologists, dieticians, nutritionists or counsellors, or a combination of these professions.

Remind your young person that they don't have to see a GP alone; you or another trusted loved one like a parent, carer, friend or teacher can help them speak out about the problems they are facing. The more people who know, the more help they'll get to break the cycle of eating disorders.

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Remember – young people have done nothing to bring this on themselves and any shame or guilt they feel is down to the eating disorder, not them. Don't let the disorder win.

### **How can No5 help?**

Learning to effectively deal with the issues at the root of eating disorders is important, as not dealt with it can cause long-term issues that last into adulthood, so it is vitally important for a young person to talk to somebody about it if things are becoming too much to handle. Here at No5 we offer free, impartial and confidential support to young people aged 10-25. Come and talk to us – counselling is about listening to, and helping them work through their problems and find more effective ways of dealing with life's issues, in a caring, trusting environment.

### **Ways to contact us:**

**Counselling Phone:** 0118 901 5668

**Admin Phone:** 0118 901 5649

**E-mail:** [info@no5.org.uk](mailto:info@no5.org.uk)

### **Address:**

No5 Young People's Counselling and Information  
2-4 Sackville Street  
Reading, RG1 1NT

### **Social Media:**

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/no5youngpeople>

**Twitter:** @no5youngpeople

### **Our Opening Hours are:**

Monday	16:00 – 21:00
Tuesday	10:00 – 13:00 and 16:00 – 21:00
Wednesday	16:00 – 21:00
Thursday	16:00 – 21:00
Friday	16:00 – 21:00
Saturday & Sunday	Closed

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