

# Youth Mental Health Factsheet

## Eating Disorder

### What is an Eating Disorder?

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**Eating Disorders are not just about food, weight, looks or will power but are a serious mental health issue that can become life threatening<sup>1</sup>.**

Most eating disorders occur when there is an incorrect view and belief about appearance, body shape and weight that lead to changes in eating patterns and exercise. 16% of Australians 15 years and over have either an eating disorder or have had symptoms of an eating disorder in the last 3 months<sup>2</sup>.

There are a variety of different eating disorders and each one has different treatments available. Some of these eating disorders are:

- Anorexia Nervosa
- Bulimia Nervosa
- Binge Eating Disorder

### Signs & Symptoms of an Eating Disorder

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While there can be a variety of symptoms in regards to eating disorders, once physical symptoms become noticeable the problem is likely more severe.

#### **Behavioural:**

Dieting behaviours, deliberate vomiting, binge eating, use of laxatives, excessive or obsessive exercise, changes in food preferences, avoiding meals, lying about food consumption, focusing on body shape and weight, and social withdrawal.

#### **Physical:**

Weight loss or gain, feeling cold even when it is warm, changes in mental patterns, swelling around the jaw and cheeks, fainting, dental discolouration and calluses on the knuckles.

#### **Psychological:**

Pre-occupation with food, body shape and weight, distorted body image, sensitive to comments about exercise, food and body shape, anxiety (more so at meal times), depression, low self-esteem, rigid thinking about food.

### What Causes an Eating Disorder

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As with other mental illnesses there is no single cause. There are a range of social, psychological and biological factors that can contribute to the risk of developing an eating disorder.

These factors can include family conflict, abuse, family history of dieting, pressure to be a certain body size due to work (model or jockey) or recreation (ballet, gymnastics etc), low self esteem, anxiety, living in a larger body, and family members with an eating disorder.

### What help is available?

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There are a variety of different eating disorders and each requires slightly different approaches to treatment. Treatment is usually long-term and intensive, depending on how severe the eating disorder is, but getting treatment is vital and recovery is possible. A variety of professionals can help: GP, psychologist, psychiatrist, mental health nurse and dietician. Make an appointment to see your doctor or GP and they can navigate the best treatment for you and help set up a mental health plan for you.

**Continued...**

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1. Fairburn CG, Harrison PJ. Eating disorders. *Lancet* 2003; 361: 407-16

2. Hay P, Girosi F, Mond J. Prevalence and sociodemographic correlates of DSM-5 eating disorders in the Australian population. *Journal of Eating Disorders* 2015; 3:1-7

## What help is available? ...continued

Examples of different treatment approaches include:

- **Anorexia:**  
The immediate focus is restoring physical health and a healthy weight. Family Therapy is the most effective treatment for anorexia.
- **Bulimia and binge eating disorder:**  
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is regarded as the best treatment for these two disorders, aiming to change eating habits and restrictive behaviours. Self help books and internet therapy can be useful but need to be under the direction of a health practitioner.

## How can I help myself?

The best thing you can do to help yourself is make an appointment with your doctor or GP and speak to them honestly about your eating and exercise habits. Eating Disorders can be hard to navigate, because your view on your body does not often reflect reality, and restricting food and increased exercise can put your health at risk.

While there is online help available you want to be very careful about what you search and look at when you have an eating disorder. The below organisation is one we highly recommend.

- The *Butterfly Foundation* has great information about eating disorders as well as links to online support. They also have a hotline you can call on 1800 33 4673.
- [www.butterfly.org.au](http://www.butterfly.org.au)

**Do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,  
that by testing you may discern what is the will of God,  
what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

**Romans 12:2**

**But the LORD said to Samuel,  
“Do not look on his appearance or on the height  
of his stature, because I have rejected him.  
For the LORD sees not as man sees:  
man looks on the outward appearance,  
but the LORD looks on the heart.”**

**I Samuel 16:7**