

# New Day Counselling

## Eating Disorder Fact Sheet

### What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is when you develop an unhealthy relationship with food, which can dominate your life and affect your physical and mental health.

For many people, eating disorders can be serious and life-threatening conditions – and recovery on your own can be difficult. Therefore, support is vital. Early intervention is important but it's also never too late to get help. There are a lot of myths around eating disorders.

Here are some of them:

- Eating disorders are a choice
- Parents are to blame for eating disorders
- Eating disorders are just attention seeking
- You must be underweight to have an eating disorder
- It only affects young girls
- Eating disorders are a diet gone wrong

For some people, their behaviour around food can be a coping mechanism for painful emotions or to take control of their lives.

### How do you know if you have an eating disorder?

Eating disorders can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. The symptoms can vary for each individual, depending on the type of eating disorder you have.

Common signs of eating disorders include:

- being preoccupied with your weight or body shape
- eating very little food or skipping meals
- binge-eating
- making yourself sick, using laxatives
- exercising too much or finding it hard to have a rest day

You may avoid socialising if food is involved or have particular food rituals, and routines

Here are a few physical warning signs which may include:

- noticeable changes in weight
- dizziness
- feeling cold
- problems sleeping and poor concentration
- digestive problems
- dry skin, hair , brittle nails problems to teeth
- for women and girls - periods become irregular or stop
- feeling anxiety and depression
- mood swings

## What are some eating disorders?

### **What is Anorexia Nervosa?**

With anorexia, you may become anxious about trying to keep your weight as low as possible by not eating enough or by over exercising. While you may be underweight, in the mirror you see yourself as a healthy weight or even fat.

### **What is Bulimia?**

With bulimia, you binge eat food and then make yourself sick, use laxatives or exercise to stop yourself gaining weight. You may become obsessive about your self-image.

### **What is Binge Eating Disorder?**

You lose control of your eating habits and eat large quantities of unhealthy food. This can leave you feeling uncomfortably full, very distressed and full of shame afterwards. Your binges may be planned in advance, or spontaneous.

### **How to get help for an eating disorder?**

Admitting you have an eating disorder in the first place and asking for support is a big step, which can be very difficult for many people.

The sooner you seek help for your eating disorder, the better chance of recovery you have. Consult your GP about the right treatment for you.

You can also look for a private therapist. But counselling for eating disorders is complex so make sure the therapist has specialist experience and training, as I do.

I work with mild and moderate eating disorders. I am not a medical practitioner, so in some cases you might need to have regular check ups and I may need to be in contact with your GP for the therapeutic relationship to evolve.

## **What causes eating disorders?**

We do not know exactly why someone develops an eating disorder. It may come from pressures from social media and fashion magazines. Some people believe it is a way to feel in control. Others believe that eating disorders develop because of social pressures to be thin. Most specialists believe that eating disorders develop because of a mix of psychological, environmental and genetic factors.

### **Psychological factors could be:**

- being vulnerable to depression and anxiety,
- finding stress hard to handle,
- worrying a lot about the future,
- being a perfectionist,
- controlling your emotions,
- having obsessive or compulsive feelings, or
- a fear of being fat.

### **Environmental factors could be:**

- pressure at school,
- bullying,
- abuse,
- criticised for your body shape or eating habits,
- having difficult family relationships, or
- having a job or hobby where being thin is seen as ideal. Such as dancing or athletics.

### **Genetic factors could be:**

- changes in the brain or hormone levels, or
- family history of eating disorders, depression or substance misuse.

## **How can therapy help?**

Counselling gives you a safe space to explore your feelings and begin to understand the underlying causes of your eating disorder. In some cases, you may feel that your eating is the only thing you have control over in your life. A counsellor will help you regain control of your eating and find a healthy, balanced way to move forward, by helping change unwanted thoughts and behaviours.

You must remember that an eating disorder is a mental illness that can affect your entire being.

**Counselling can help explore:**

- your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours.
- what the eating disorder means to you.
- how they affect you and your relationships with other people.
- Your beliefs and values.
- helping you to implement what you have learned into everyday life.