

At SYEDA we aim to offer support to people who feel that their relationship with food or body image is causing them emotional distress.

The aim of this document is to:

- Provide an overview of what Eating Disorders are
- Highlight possible signs to look out for
- Offer practical tips to help you support someone who may be struggling with disordered eating.

What is an Eating Disorder?

Eating Disorders are complex psychological illnesses. They are an expression of emotional turmoil where food is often used as a distraction method or coping strategy to try and manage uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

An Eating Disorder may be:

A manifestation of unresolved trauma	An identity for someone who is unsure of their own
An attempt to acquire perfection	A way to try and cope with transitions and onset puberty
A way to provide comfort	A way to protect someone from unwanted feelings
Something that offers consistency	Any <i>many</i> more.....

Anybody, regardless of age, gender or body size can develop an Eating Disorder.

“Over time, restriction, weighing and calorie counting became my subliminal coping mechanisms. I didn’t realise I was relying on them as a distraction from everything I didn’t want to think about. They became something else to focus on. Something that I could manage – that I was in charge of”.

Men’s Fitness: Understanding Male Anorexia March 2020

Eating disorders are often **secretive illnesses**. However, our hope is that this resource will enable you to spot some of the possible signs of an Eating Disorder.

Possible signs to look out for if you are concerned about someone

Eating Disorders are experienced differently by each person. However, there are some common signs that might point towards someone struggling with their body image and food.

- You might notice a change in someone’s eating habits. This could be the amount of food that is being consumed or what they are eating.
- You might observe changes in behaviour for example irritable or erratic behaviour.
- There may be increased isolation as someone becomes avoidant of social situations and withdraws from their peer group.
- You may notice a change in weight, although this may not always be the case.
- If someone is feeling conscious of their body they may start to wear baggy clothes.
- There may be an increase in exercise.

How can you support someone who may be struggling with an Eating Disorder?

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and offer support • Ask how you can help—perhaps offer to go to the GP with them • Talk to the person about their interests, goals and ambitions • Reassure that you are there to support them • Know the information of services that might help for example the BEAT helpline: 0808 801 0677 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be judgemental • Give advice • Focus on body image or size in conversations • Give simple solutions. For example, <i>"If you just start eating, then everything would be fine"</i> • Be upset if they deny there is problem. Denial can be common in relation to Eating Disorders.

An Eating Disorder will be experienced by each person differently. If you have any concerns about someone the best thing to do is seek advice and contact a health care professional. This document is used to offer guidance only, please apply your own understanding and feel free to contact us at SYEDA if you have questions or concerns.