

Eating disorders tip sheet

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are mental health conditions, not a lifestyle choice. They involve a difficult relationship with food, eating, exercise and body image, and can affect people of all ages, genders, body sizes and backgrounds. There is no single cause; biological, psychological and social factors can all play a part. Support is available, and reaching out early can help.

Common signs

Signs can be hard to notice, and some people show few or none. Some people experience:

- Being preoccupied with food, eating, weight or body shape
- Feeling anxious or irritable around meal times
- Feeling out of control around food
- Strict dieting or cutting out food groups
- Avoiding eating with other people
- Changes in weight, or feeling tired, dizzy or cold
- Exercising even when sick or injured
- Being very sensitive to comments about body or eating

Things that may help

These general ideas may be helpful for you or someone you care about, alongside support from health professionals.

Talking to someone you trust

Sharing what is happening with a trusted friend, family member or health professional can be an important first step.

Self kindness

Some people find it helps to speak to themselves with the same care they would offer a friend. Low self esteem and body dissatisfaction are linked with eating disorders.

Dieting

Research links strict or extreme dieting with a higher risk of eating disorders. A GP can talk with you about any changes to eating or exercise.

What you take in

Many images in media and advertising are edited and unrealistic. Some people find stepping back from content that leaves them feeling worse about their body helpful.

Things that **may help** (continued)

Supporting someone else

If you are worried about someone, a calm, private time to talk may help. Many people find focusing on feelings rather than food or weight helpful, and a GP can be a good place to start.

Reaching out early

There is no need to wait until things feel serious. Speaking with a GP or a support line can help you understand your options.

When to get **more support**

If things are becoming unmanageable and affecting your social, family, work or study life, you may want to see your GP or a psychologist. You do not need to wait until things feel serious to reach out.

A GP can be a good place to start. They can talk with you about your physical health and about health professionals experienced in eating disorders, such as a psychologist or dietitian. If you are worried about someone else, a GP or support service can also be a helpful place to talk.

The Butterfly National Helpline (1800 33 4673) offers confidential support for eating disorders and body image concerns, 8am to midnight, 7 days a week. Online chat and email are also available through butterfly.org.au.

Benefits of **seeking support**

- Talking with a GP or psychologist may help you make sense of what is happening.
- Support might help you feel less alone with what you are going through.
- A psychologist could offer new ways of coping that suit you.
- Reaching out early could help you understand the options available.

Need help **right now?**

If you or someone else is in danger or thinking about suicide, please reach out now.

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Emergency services, if life is in danger

13 11 14

Lifeline crisis support, 24 hours, 7 days

13 92 76

13YARN, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 24/7

Trusted **Australian resources**

Butterfly Foundation butterfly.org.au | 1800 33 4673

InsideOut Institute insideoutinstitute.org.au

National Eating Disorders Collaboration nedc.com.au

This tip sheet offers general information only and does not replace advice from your GP, psychologist or other health professional.