

# FACTS ABOUT EATING DISORDERS

## WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

Eating disorders are serious and complex issues relating to eating behaviours, body image and weight.

An individual who is suffering from an eating disorder may engage in abnormal eating and exercise and often, have an unhealthy pre-occupation with their body weight and shape.

Eating disorders are often viewed as a 'phase', 'fad', or common dieting behaviour, but they are serious and often have dangerous consequences. Medical and psychological complications often accompany eating disorders, which require assessment and treatment by professionals.

Rates are on the rise, and mortality rates are the highest for any psychological disorder. Approximately 180000 young women and 70000 young men aged between 15 -24 in Australia suffered from an eating disorder in 2012.

There are several types of eating disorders, each with their own distinguishing behaviours.

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## BULIMIA NERVOSA

Sufferers engage in regular eating 'binges', accompanied by feelings of loss of control about their eating. This episode is often followed by feelings of guilt and anxiety about putting on weight, which results in a need to rid themselves of the food, usually done by extreme exercise, purging, consuming laxatives or diuretics, or not eating for long periods. Common effects include sore throat, decaying teeth, rupturing of oesophagus and fatigue.

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## ANOREXIA NERVOSA

Sufferers are obsessed by weight and although they are usually underweight, they view themselves as fat. Food, weight and appearance become the focus for them and the individual may attempt to control their weight through food deprivation or restrictions and excessive exercise. Common effects include chemical imbalances, hair loss, body hair growth (lanugo), lack of motivation, brittle nails and interruption to menstrual cycle.

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## BINGE EATING DISORDER

This is similar to bulimia except that the sufferer does not rid himself or herself of the food following the binge. They may feel their eating is out of control, as they consume large amounts of food to the point of being uncomfortable, even when they are not feeling hungry. They may feel disgusted, depressed, guilty or embarrassed by the amount of food they consume, and become secretive of their eating behaviours. This disorder can result in serious health concerns such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

## SYMPTOMS

- Depression and anxiety
- Irritability
- Fear of loss of control or negative feelings over eating
- Obsession with weight
- Low self esteem
- Distorted body image
- Abnormal eating behaviour
- Over exercising
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Significant weight loss
- Social withdrawal

## CAUSES

Eating disorders appear to stem from a combination of physical, psychological and social factors, however the exact causes are not clear and vary from individual to individual. These factors may include physical, emotional or sexual abuse, feelings of loss or grief, a cultural emphasis on body image, effects from dieting, feelings of lack of control, and genetic factors. Other factors include peer or family pressure and low self-esteem.

## TREATMENT

- Psychological treatment and counselling - focusing on coping strategies, education of negative effects, low self-esteem, dysfunctional attitudes of weight and body shape, nutritional counselling and family therapy
- Medication
- Education
- Support groups

## HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

Eating disorders are psychological illnesses that are treatable. It is important to acknowledge that you need help. You may wish to talk with somebody you trust such as a friend, parent or family member so they can provide the support you need. You may find it difficult to talk about your issues due to feelings of shame or embarrassment however getting treatment is one of the most important things you can do.

## HOW CAN FAMILY AND FRIENDS HELP?

Be understanding and emphatic, reminding the person they can recover, including providing emotional support and reassurance. It is important to be non-judgemental and encourage them to talk about their recovery.

## REFERRAL/SUPPORT INFO

**Drug ARM** 1300 656 800  
info@drugarm.com.au  
drugarm.com.au

**Drug ARM Central Intake**  
07 3620 8880

**Lifeline Australia** 13 11 14  
24/7 crisis support

**The Butterfly Foundation** 1800 33 46 73

**Or contact your local GP (General Practitioner)**

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## REFERENCES

1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017). Australia's health: 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-health/2014/healthy-life/>



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