

# Ordinary Magic

# Eating Disorders

Fact Sheet and Top Tips

## What is it?

An eating disorder is a medical diagnosis that is based on your everyday eating patterns, body mass index (BMI) and weight. People with eating disorders tend to be extremely critical of themselves and their bodies and have very low self-esteem.

## What causes eating disorders?

Eating disorders can be caused by a variety of factors. Some of these include:

**Genetics** – There have been multiple studies involving twins that were adopted by different families at birth, but both still have eating disorders. Research also shows that if one twin develops an eating disorder, the other has a 50% chance of developing one too.

**Societal Pressures** – In recent years as the use of social media has increased in our everyday lives, there is a perceived pressure to be thin, beautiful and have certain beauty characteristics such as flawless skin, blue/green eyes, no hair on your body etc...

**Personality traits** – Neuroticism, perfectionism and impulsivity are all three personality traits that have been linked to a higher risk of developing an eating disorder.

**Brain structure** - People with eating disorders found they can sometimes have structural abnormalities in the orbitofrontal cortex.

**Hormones and neurotransmitters** – When bingeing (bulimia) this will weaken the response of dopamine in the reward circuit (dopamine – substance that helps control our pleasure and reward system). This means you experience less pleasure from eating so you binge to feel more reward. Regarding anorexia, you release dopamine when starving instead of eating.

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### What are the most common types of eating disorders?

1. Anorexia Nervosa
2. Bulimia Nervosa
3. Binge eating disorder

### Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is when you are not eating enough food to get the energy you need to stay healthy. The hallmarks of anorexia include limiting their food intake, the fear of being 'fat' and problems with body image or denial of low body weight. Anorexia nervosa is normally diagnosed when patients weigh at least 15% less than their normal healthy weight expected for their height.

### What you might do when having anorexia

- Reduce your food intake or stop eating entirely
- Secretly hide food or throw it away
- Obsessing over calories and counting them
- Using drugs to reduce your appetite or speed up your digestion
- Check and weigh your body frequently
- Making certain rules about food such as listing foods as 'good' or 'bad'
- Avoiding foods with high amounts of calories and fat
- Exercising a lot

### How you may feel

- Very frightened to put on weight
- A need to over-exercise whenever you have eaten
- That you have to be perfect
- You can't think about anything other than food
- You are never good enough
- Depressed or suicidal
- Anxious
- That your weight loss isn't enough
- You may feel alone
- Tired or disinterested in things

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### Bulimia Nervosa

People with bulimia nervosa binge eat very frequently and will often consume a large amount of food in a very short time. After a binge stomach pains and the fear of weight gain will make the person throw up or use laxatives. This cycle normally repeats several times a week or in more serious cases, several times a day.

### What you might do when you have Bulimia

- Eat lots of food in one go
- Starve yourself between binges
- Eat in secret
- Crave certain types of food
- Try to get rid of any food you have eaten by making yourself sick, using laxatives or exercising excessively
- Go through cycles of eating, feeling guilty, purging, feeling hungry and eating again throughout the day.

### How you may feel

- That you hate your body or think you are fat
- Numb like feelings are blocked out
- Very low and upset
- Depressed or anxious
- Ashamed and guilty
- Scared of being found out by friends and family
- Lonely
- Like you are stuck in an endless cycle and feel out of control
- Hopeless



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## Binge Eating Disorder

People with binge eating disorder have episodes of binge eating which is when they consume very large quantities of food in a small period of time and they tend to feel out of control when doing this. This can come across as very similar to Bulimia nervosa but instead of with Bulimia you get rid of the food by vomiting, people with binge eating disorders use other unsafe practises such as fasting or laxatives.

## What you might do when you have a binge eating disorder

- Eat large amounts of food all at once (bingeing)
- Eating for comfort such as when you feel stressed, upset, unhappy etc...
- Try to diet but find it hard
- Hide how much you are eating
- Eating without thinking about it
- Eat until you feel uncomfortably full or sick

## How you may feel

- Out of control
- Lonely and empty
- Very low
- Worthless
- Unhappy about your body
- Embarrassed or ashamed



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### Recovery and self care

Recovery means different things to different people. For some people this means that you don't ever have an eating problem again but for some people this may mean you still have them, but they don't happen as often as before.

The first step to the road of the recovery from an eating disorder starts with admitting you have a problem. The good news is that the behaviours you've learned can also be unlearned. Just as anyone can develop an eating disorder, so too, anyone can get better. However, overcoming an eating disorder is about more than giving up unhealthy eating behaviours. It's also about learning new ways to cope with emotional pain and rediscovering who you are beyond your eating habits, weight, and body image.

Recovering from an eating disorder involves learning to:

- Listening to your body
- Listening to your feelings
- Accepting yourself
- Loving yourself

Once you have decided to make a change, opening about the problem to others is the next step to take. This could be a close friend, family, teacher, doctor or a therapist. Whilst family and friends can be a huge help in providing support, there are also support groups in which they provide a safe environment where you can talk freely about your eating disorder and get advice from people who know what you are going through

Some other useful long-term treatment plans may include:

Individual or group therapy  
Family therapy  
Nutritional counselling  
Medical monitoring  
Residential treatment

To also find eating disorders support services you can use the NHS website (<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Eating%20disorder%20support/LocationSearch/341>) to find the best support services nearest to you.

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### Self Care Tips

While seeking support from professional help is very important, your own role in your recovery is also just as important. The more motivated you are to understand why you developed an eating disorder and to learn healthier coping skills, the quicker you will see a change and healing. Here are a few tips:

#### Learning healthier ways to cope with emotional pain

The first step is to figure out what is really going on inside. Are you upset about something? Depressed? Lonely? Are you eating to calm down, comfort yourself or to relieve boredom? Once you identify the emotion you're experiencing, you can choose a positive alternative to starving or bingeing.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Call a friend
- Listen to music
- Paint
- Reading a book
- Take a walk
- Writing in your journal
- Going to the movies

#### Develop a balanced relationship with food

Most people with eating disorders struggle with issues of control when it comes to food often fluctuating between strict rules and chaos. The goal is to find a balance. Here are a few tips:

- Try to let go of rigid eating rules
- Try not to diet
- Try sticking to a regular eating schedule
- Try to listen to your body

#### Learn to accept and love yourself as you are

When you base your self-worth on physical appearance alone, you're ignoring all the other qualities, accomplishments, and abilities that make you beautiful. Think about your friends and family members. Do they love you for the way you look or who you are?

Placing too much importance on how you look leads to low self-esteem and insecurity. But you can learn to see yourself in a positive, balanced way:

Make a list of your positive qualities

Try to stop body checking/criticising

Challenge negative talk

Try to stop comparing yourself to others