

Help For Young People

Youthline 0845 634 7650

Mon - Fri 16.30 - 20.30

Sat 13.00 - 16.30

E-mail FYP@b-eat.co.uk

TEXT 07786 20 18 20

Help For Adults

Helpline 0845 634 1414

Mon - Fri 10.30 - 20.30

Sat 13.00 - 16.30

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together we will beat eating disorders

beat is the organisation that believes eating disorders will be beaten. We challenge the stigma that people with eating disorders face. We campaign to improve treatment and healthcare services.

Eating disorders will be beaten

- when you have the information you need
- when you know the range of treatments available and how you can access them
- when you know who can help you
- when you know how you can help someone you care for.

Parents want eating disorders to be beaten, young people need to know they can beat their eating disorder, and professionals want to be part of beating eating disorders too.

If you are affected by an eating disorder, or someone you love or care about is caught up in one, it's hard to believe the illness can be beaten. This leaflet is for you. It tells you how to find the services that most fit your needs but also explains a little more about how to recognise an eating disorder and how you can start to beat it.

We know that eating disorders can be beaten.

Together we will beat eating disorders.

understanding eating disorders

Eating disorders are not a diet gone wrong or a fad or fashion. They are a way of coping with difficult thoughts, emotions or experiences.

"I used eating as a way of keeping control, I didn't have much confidence but I felt that if I could control what I ate I could cope with everything."

Most often, when people talk about eating disorders, they think of Anorexia and Bulimia. There is now growing awareness that some people suffer a mix of eating disorder behaviours or may be affected by some symptoms of Anorexia or Bulimia but not others.

Everyone experiences their eating disorder in their own way. Whatever form it takes, an eating disorder can be beaten. Understanding an eating disorder and having the information about where you can go to find out more is a good first step towards beating an eating disorder.

beat's experience shows that support from friends and family can really help people towards recovery. So if you are a parent or friend or family member reading this part of the leaflet, we have written it so you can understand how someone may experience their eating disorder. It may help you to understand their thought processes so you can help them beat their eating disorder.

what is Anorexia?

Anorexia stems from low self esteem and an inability to cope safely with worries and problems. It involves restricting the amount of food you take in by skipping meals and cutting down the types and amounts of food you eat; some people over-exercise as well. You may believe that if you lose weight your life would be happier, people will like you more, you will be more successful or even perhaps that you may be noticed less.

"I thought about food and calories all the time. I tried to avoid foods containing lots of fat or carbohydrates and only had 'safe' foods which I felt were OK to eat."

"Sometimes I skipped meals and did a lot of exercise especially on the days when I could not avoid eating. I felt I had to punish myself for eating and try to lose the calories I had eaten."

"Losing weight gave me a real buzz and I felt good at something. At first, starving myself and over-exercising made me feel great and that I had loads of energy. Later I found out that this was an 'artificial high' and that it was my body's way of telling me to find food."

"As I lost weight I began to feel tired and this made me more depressed. I couldn't think straight or concentrate at school. All I could think about was food because my brain and body were craving for it. I realise now I was suffering from the effects of starvation."

"I had a 'voice' in my head that shouted at me. It told me I was fat and worthless and that I was not allowed to eat because I did not deserve food. I thought I was in control of my eating but it got harder and harder to ignore the voice."

Losing weight is not the answer to everything. It is important that you try and focus on who you are, and what may have caused you to feel the way you do. You will need to change the way you feel about yourself and aim to find safer ways of coping.

Some of the ways that Anorexia can affect you are:

Your body

Severe weight loss; difficulty sleeping and tiredness; dizziness; stomach pains; constipation; feeling cold; growth of soft, fine hair all over your body; your periods stop or don't start; feeling uninterested in sex; poor skin; your hair falls out.

How you behave

Excessive exercising; having ritual or obsessive behaviours; being secretive; lying about eating; trying to please everyone often alternating with being very angry; cooking or preparing food for everyone else; wearing baggy clothes.

How you think and feel

Feeling fat when you are really underweight; getting irritable and moody; setting high standards and being a perfectionist; shutting yourself off from the world; thinking things are either right or wrong, there is no in between; difficulty concentrating.

what is Bulimia?

Bulimia is also linked with low self esteem, emotional problems and stress. You may constantly think about calories, dieting and ways of getting rid of the food you have eaten. Bulimia is actually more common than Anorexia, but is more hidden because people with Bulimia usually remain an average or just over average body weight. Bulimia can go unnoticed for a long time, although you may feel ill and very unhappy.

"I used to go to the food cupboard, fridge or freezer and eat as much as I could, as quickly as possible, to try to make myself feel happier and fill the hole I felt I had inside. Afterwards I felt physically and emotionally upset and guilty about all the food I had eaten, so I would make myself sick."

If you have Bulimia you become involved in a cycle of eating large amounts of food, making yourself sick, cutting down or starving for a few days or trying to find other ways to make up for the food you have eaten. Starving causes you to become so hungry that you eat large quantities of food because your body is craving nourishment. Some people do not vomit but take laxatives or diuretics; both behaviours may be described as 'purging' by medical professionals but taking laxatives or diuretics is particularly dangerous.

"I felt inadequate, unattractive and worthless. I acted almost without thinking and afterwards I regretted what I had eaten. Sometimes when I was out with friends I felt OK, but when I was home on my own I often felt depressed."

"People thought I was really popular and together, but I knew I wasn't, I felt like a fake. I thought that people wouldn't like me if they knew what I was really like."

Just because Bulimia does not cause the extreme weight loss that Anorexia does, it does not mean that it is less serious. You need to get help and support. The side effects and consequences of Bulimia can be very serious indeed.

Symptoms of Bulimia may include some of the following:

Your body

Sore throat, bad breath and mouth infections; stomach pains; irregular periods; dry or poor skin; difficulty sleeping; constipation; puffy cheeks; dehydration; fainting; kidney and bowel problems.

How you behave

Eating large quantities of food; being sick after meals or binges; taking laxatives or diet pills; being secretive and lying.

How you think and feel

Feeling emotional and depressed; feeling out of control; mood swings; obsessed with dieting.

what is Binge Eating Disorder (BED) and compulsive overeating?

If you binge eat, you may eat large amounts of food in a short period of time, you may focus on eating one particular food, you may select food randomly. The pattern of eating in a binge is very different from sitting down and having a meal. You may feel a lack of control during these binges, but unlike someone with Bulimia Nervosa, you do not try to get rid of the food. You may eat much more quickly, eat until you are uncomfortably full, eat large amounts of food when you are not hungry or eat alone. You do this for very similar reasons to someone with Bulimia.

Compulsive overeating involves 'picking' at food all day. There may be different reasons why you do this, but as with eating disorders, food and eating is used as a way of dealing with difficult feelings. If you compulsively overeat or binge eat, you may feel depressed or inadequate because you cannot control your eating, which can lead to further eating and weight gain.

"I spent all my time thinking about food. I even woke up at night thinking about it."

"Sometimes I just feel that I've lost all control, that nobody in the world can feel as bad as I do after a binge, then I just start worrying about my weight. It never goes away."

Symptoms of binge eating may include some of the following:

Your body

Weight gain; stomach pains; irregular periods; poor or spotty skin; difficulty sleeping; constipation.

How you behave

Eating large quantities of food; being secretive and lying about how much you have eaten.

How you think and feel

Feeling emotional and depressed; feeling out of control; mood swings; obsessed with weight.

This cycle of bingeing and starving or purging can be broken, but you will need professional help to deal with some aspects of your emotional problems.

The most important thing is to make sure you eat enough. It sounds strange to say that to avoid a binge you should eat more, but many people binge after a period of starving themselves, so the body is hungry and it craves huge amounts of food. Then you may eat very little, because you feel so guilty about bingeing, and a cycle occurs. Make sure that you have enough to eat before and at school, college, or work to avoid a binge when you get home.

“I kept a diary and jotted down my feelings - when I was about to binge or overeat, to see if I could spot a pattern which set it off, if I was angry or bored. I then tried to change the way I reacted to that feeling, it wasn't easy but it really helped.”

beat fact

beat's experience shows that if you are struggling with food and eating, you do need to get medical advice. Going to the doctor for the first time can be a big step. We can help you take that step and support you to make the right decisions. Visit our website www.b-eat.co.uk or contact the beat Helplines to find out more. You will find the numbers on the back page of this leaflet.

will I be able to beat this eating disorder and get better?

You can beat your eating disorder.

what does beating my eating disorder mean?

At beat, we know that people affected should get the best possible support, information and treatment to help them beat their eating disorder. We believe that you are beating your eating disorder when you accept that you need help and support. You are beating an eating disorder when you go and get that help and support. You are beating your eating disorder when you no longer struggle to do the things you used to do: seeing friends, going out to the movies, going to work. Each step, however small or large, is a step towards beating an eating disorder.

will I beat this problem completely?

Most people make a full recovery from an eating disorder, but it can take some time. Part of you may want to get better while the other part might be very scared about giving up the eating disorder. You are likely to have good days and bad days. At times of stress, eating difficulties may return. To change your ways of thinking and feeling is never easy and it takes time, but it really is worth it.

“I want to get better, but first I have to feel OK about putting on weight, and that’s difficult.”

Here are some tips from people who found these things helpful during their recovery:

- I started to think about my feelings and tried not to run away from them. I found it helpful to express difficult emotions in safe ways, e.g. telling someone, drawing, writing them down, punching a cushion, shouting, screaming or crying.
- I talked to somebody I could trust. I often rang a friend or a helpline. They helped when things got difficult.
- I learnt when I needed space and when to take it.
- I felt better and less stressed when I did things like yoga, relaxation, drama, painting, listening to music.
- I kept a diary and wrote down how I felt during the day. Especially when I had an urge to binge, purge, over exercise or skip a meal.
- I found challenging my beliefs and ‘the voice’ helped. It kept telling me to be perfect, and I was worthless.
- I got involved with others and attended a support group.

Remember, different things work for different people. Some of these things might also help you to avoid other dangerous coping mechanisms, e.g. self harm and substance misuse.

During recovery you may have days where you slip back in to ‘old habits’. It is important you don’t see these lapses as failures and give up - they are a natural part of recovery and you can learn from them. Recovering from an eating disorder is not like recovering from a cold - you will have ups and downs but this is part of the process. Remember, you can talk to beat to help you through these tricky times.

Recovering from an eating disorder might seem like a difficult process for everyone involved. However, many others have done it, and so can you. It is possible for you to gain new confidence and begin to realise there are other ways of living.

“Recovery isn’t easy, I’m so proud I got there.”

“Recovery taught me so much about myself. I learned about the people I love, the person I am and how much I want to live and be happy. These are the things I am going to hang on to.”

beat fact

There may be part of you that says you can recover on your own, that you don’t need the help of anyone else, least of all a doctor or a friend or family member. But it is so much easier to have the help of somebody you trust. Having an eating disorder can be really lonely, so try and think of someone who can help you. You could try talking to a friend, a teacher, a colleague. You could also contact beat. We have a website, with message boards and live chats - you can use these to get help from others who know exactly what you are feeling. Just visit www.b-eat.co.uk to find out more.

getting help

who can I talk to?

You might want to get help but are afraid of how people around you will react. You may be afraid that others will become angry with you. You may fear you will lose the control you have over your life. You might be frightened about having to change your weight. Telling someone how you feel can be very scary and it takes a lot of courage. However, it is one of the most important steps you can take towards getting better.

Telling someone for the first time can be a huge release. You may have been bottling feelings up, hiding from your friends. It can give you a reminder that there are people who can understand you and want to give you help and support. Telling someone means that you no longer have to be alone with your eating disorder.

If you are at school, there might be someone that you trust who you could talk to, such as a favourite teacher or the school nurse. If you are at work, you might have an understanding boss or a good HR department. Whoever you are, try to find someone who you can talk to openly about your problems.

You may also be ready to talk to your family or your partner. That may seem scary but those closest to you can often provide the best sort of help. You may be worried about talking to your partner because you have kept your eating disorder a secret for so long. We have given you some tips on how to talk to your family overleaf.

Remember to tell them how much they and their support means to you.

beat fact

Our Helplines talk to people every day who are afraid to talk about their eating disorders and think that their problems are trivial or just plain silly. You may recognise this feeling. Just remember that your friends and family, your school mates or teachers are probably already worried about you too. They want to help you or find help for you.

“I was so scared about telling my dad, I thought he would be angry but he was so relieved - he really helped me think about going to the doctor.”

If you need answers to questions, support, or a listening ear you can contact the beat Helplines. We also reply to letters and e-mails if you find it difficult to call or just prefer to write. The contact details are on the back cover. If you would like to look for some more information before talking to someone visit the website at www.b-eat.co.uk.

how do I talk to my family?

Decide what is right for your situation. You may just want to tell one family member at a time or tell them all together. You may feel that you would prefer to talk to another member of the family first rather than your parents/carers and ask them to help you tell others. If you still live at home, it is usually a good idea to tell brothers or sisters but it's important that you don't make them uncomfortable by asking them to keep it a secret.

Try to avoid talking about your eating disorder at times which are particularly stressful for you. So don't raise the subject during a meal time, wait until an opportunity when you have time and space to talk. It may also take a little time for what you are saying to sink in, have some information on hand to help your family understand what you have been going through.

You may find it helpful to plan what you are going to say or even write it down in advance. Don't expect people to understand everything at once and remember the person you tell can also contact the beat Helplines. They can also visit our website www.b-eat.co.uk/carers.

do I have to see a doctor or health professional?

It is very difficult to get better on your own if you have an eating disorder. As well as having support from those who care for you, you need to have professional help. Doctors can assess your physical condition and refer you to available help. Eating disorders can make you very physically ill as well as affecting your thoughts and feelings about yourself.

talking to the doctor

Going to the doctor can make you feel nervous or scared. There may be difficult issues you want to discuss or questions you want to ask. Sometimes it can be helpful to write down a list of questions before you go. If you find the answers difficult to follow, then ask the person to explain until you do understand. It is important that you know what is happening and why. Take notes if you think it will help you to remember.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- What will happen next?
- What will my treatment involve?
- Are any other people likely to be involved?
- What are the drugs / medicine for?
- Is there anyone I can go to locally that I can talk to about my feelings?
- Do I have to go into hospital?

You need to feel confident that your doctor understands you and that you can trust them. If you feel that you cannot talk to your usual doctor, you can usually see another doctor in the same practice or you can talk to someone else in the surgery, such as a nurse or health visitor.

You can contact NHS Direct for details about other doctors and how to move to another practice.

"It was quite good having someone with me when I had to talk about my eating disorder. If there was something I didn't understand or if I wanted to ask anything, she would help me. Sometimes she didn't understand either, and she would find out, which made me feel less stupid!"

"I was so scared about telling my doctor. I really believed that he would tell me that I was too fat to have Anorexia. He said that I should tell my parents, but I didn't want to because I didn't want to let them down. Now I don't know what I would have done without them."

what will my treatment involve?

Eating disorders are complex conditions, and it can take a number of different professionals working together to treat them. Your GP should be able to make a diagnosis and tell you what sort of eating disorder they think you have. They may ask for a specialist to see you and make an assessment of your treatment needs.

Eating disorders affect you physically as well as emotionally and your treatment needs to address this. If you are a very low weight, then starting to eat again will be a priority, and your treatment may focus on this. You should be offered some psychological therapy - talking to a counsellor or therapist to help

you with any emotional difficulties the eating disorder has caused. A dietician or nutritional counsellor can help with meal plans and food choices.

If you are a young person, you may be offered family therapy. This isn't because all your family is ill too - it is because having your family involved is an extremely effective way to help you get well.

If you need to see a specialist, most treatment takes place as an out-patient. Only the most seriously ill people and those who are also physically very frail should need to become an in-patient and stay in a hospital ward or special eating disorders unit.

The types and availability of treatment varies around the country and different types of help may be offered. Treatment should include dealing with the emotional as well as the physical issues but this must be done quite slowly so that you can cope with the changes. Help with eating and simply regaining weight is usually not enough by itself.

If someone is so ill their life is at risk, they can be treated even if they don't want to be. This is very rare, and there are legal safeguards in place that doctors have to follow very carefully. The beat website, www.b-eat.co.uk, gives information on other useful websites with more help and advice. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) have published treatment guidelines for England and Wales; and Quality Improvement Scotland (QIS) has produced guidelines for Scotland. You can find out more about these guidelines at www.b-eat.co.uk/nice.

what other sources of help are available to me?

helplines

beat and several other organisations run telephone helplines which offer a listening ear, support and information. Some also have trained counsellors. They provide you with a first point of contact to voice your concerns and find out what help is available to you in your area. Some helpline numbers can be located by looking in the local phonebook, some can be found on our website.

are the beat Helplines confidential?

When you contact beat's Helplines, whatever you say is just between you and beat. We would only have to break confidentiality if we believed you were in grave danger and we would always explain this to you first. If you are worried about this, phone the Helplines and ask the worker to tell you a bit more about confidentiality. You will find the beat Helpline and Youthline numbers on the back page.

self help groups

These groups provide a place to share feelings with others who have similar experiences. beat runs groups all around the country for people with eating disorders and their families. Most groups are for people of 18 and over, but if you are 16 or 17 some groups will allow you to attend if you are accompanied by an adult. This does not have to be a parent or carer, it could be an older friend or relative.

self help books

These books can help you to learn about your illness and offer step-by-step guidance to help you on the road to recovery. You may be able to find these books in your local library, larger bookstores or on the internet. beat has an online bookshop on the website at www.b-eat.co.uk.

internet

The internet can be a valuable source of information about eating disorders and services available. If you want to contact other people with eating disorders we have our own message board, which you can find on our website at www.b-eat.co.uk. You can just read what others have said or participate by sending a message. Do remember that, as with so many things on the internet, there is both good and poor information available and it can sometimes be difficult to judge which is which. Sadly there are always anonymous people out there trying to mislead you or make contact with you. The internet is not a substitute for professional help.

“Hang in there. Believe in yourself. Ask for help and you will begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

beating an eating disorder - how to help

what can I do to help?

There are lots of things you can do to help someone beat an eating disorder.

The first thing to do is just to be there. If you can listen and support in a non-judgemental way, your friend or family member will learn to trust you and trust the support you are giving. You can't beat their eating disorder for them but you can provide them with the encouragement and support they need.

Find out as much as you can about an eating disorder. This will help you understand how a person can behave when they are in the midst of their eating disorder. It will give you a context so you can understand mood swings, expressions of anger or times when the person seems isolated and withdrawn. You will need to understand the very particular pressures that people affected by eating disorders can feel - especially around food and weight issues. It can be hard for someone to let go of their eating disorder. Eating disorders are not about losing weight, they are about losing. People with eating disorders lose the chance to be with friends, enjoy and achieve, do the things that most of us take for granted. So it is really important to keep trying to include them in family activities and social arrangements as before and try and build up their self esteem. Even if they don't join in, they will still like to be asked. It will make them feel valued as a person and help raise their self-esteem.

Try not to give advice or criticism, but give time - and listen. You don't have to know all the answers and there will be times you don't know what to say, but just being there is the key. This is especially the case when things are hard to cope with, particularly when it feels like your love or friendship is being rejected.

beat fact

The sooner someone gets help and support, the better their chances of a quick recovery. It is really important that you don't wait too long to offer support and help, act on the first sign of distress but remember that that might be just to listen. The more trust you can build at the beginning, the more you will be able to work together with your family member to help beat their eating disorder.

i've really tried to help, but they won't listen -what can I do?

Sometimes, people with an eating disorder can get very angry if you try to help. It is almost as if their eating disorder is talking for them. Remember, beneath that angry exterior is a scared and frightened person. Try not to take what they say personally, but try and tell them that you will be there for them when they want help and support.

You may need to accept that they are not ready to tackle the eating disorder yet. Let them know that they can come back to you later when they are ready to talk about it. Perhaps gather some information about eating problems, to help you feel more prepared when your friend is ready to accept that they need help. There is a list of useful books and lots of information on the beat website at www.b-eat.co.uk.

beat fact

A third of all the calls we receive on the beat Helplines are from parents, carers and friends. If you want more advice on how to support someone with an eating disorder, visit our website on www.b-eat.co.uk/carers for more information and practical tips on helping someone beat their eating disorder. We also have a book "Eating Disorders: helping your child recover" which you can purchase online. And remember, the Helplines are there for you too.

we can beat eating disorders together

This leaflet is only the beginning. There is so much to find out and to learn. If you want to find out more about beat, if you want to find out how you can be involved in beating eating disorders, then please contact us.

People are beating eating disorders every day. Adults, young people, parents, carers, friends, doctors, nurses, teachers. It doesn't matter who you are or what you do. You can start to beat eating disorders today.

join us in the fight against eating disorders - become a beat supporter!

beat campaigns for better services, challenges the myths surrounding eating disorders and demands that sufferers are given the help they deserve - but we can't do it without your support.

A beat supporter will:

- Receive a quarterly magazine - Upbeat.
- Be invited to attend beat events.
- Receive regular email newsletters.
- Be able to become a beat champion.

help us to continue our work beating eating disorders

To find out more about becoming a beat supporter, have a look at our website:

www.b-eat.co.uk/supportus

e-mail info@b-eat.co.uk

or call us on 0870 770 3256