



What is an Eating Disorder?

When worries about food, weight and shape get to the point where they really affect your life, this is called an eating disorder. This leaflet can help you to think about how you feel about food and your weight, and to help you think about how it might be causing difficulties in your life.

Although many people have problems with eating at some stage in their lives, eating disorders can become very serious. They are complex and potentially life-threatening, but still misunderstood by many. While eating disorders appear to

be about dieting and food, they are normally about much more than this. They are thought of as being an outward expression of internal pain, and although it is mainly seen as a disease which affects females, 10% of all cases of eating disorders are male.

There are 4 main categories of eating disorders:

1. Anorexia Nervosa

- Restricted eating, sometimes with episodes of bingeing or purging
- Severe loss of weight
- Strong fear of being fat or gaining weight
- Loss of periods for females
- Low weight for height

2. Bulimia Nervosa

- Repeated urges to overeat

(binge) often on high calorie foods

- Repeated attempts to avoid gaining weight by making yourself sick, using laxatives or diuretics (water tablets), over exercising or extreme dieting (these are also called purging)
- Mood changes and self-esteem are overly linked to weight

4 main categories of eating disorders...

3. Binge Eating Disorder

- Eating large amounts of food (binges), often quickly and without feeling hungry, or stopping when full
- Feeling ashamed and guilty after eating - often eating is done in secret

- There is often a general increase in weight over time

4. Not Otherwise Specified

This is usually a combination of the three above types.

What causes people to get an eating disorder?

Eating disorders are difficult to understand both for the sufferer, and for those close to them. They can affect men and women of all ages, races and backgrounds. While eating disorders appear to be about food and weight they actually occur for a complex set of reasons. Below are some of the things that combined together can trigger eating disorders:-

- Low mood and depression
- Major events – changing school, puberty, illness, death of someone close
- Traumatic events – a history of physical or sexual abuse
- 'Ideal' images from society and the media
- A need to regain control
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- Perfectionism and unreal expectations
- Stress, change or difficult feelings

Each of these disorders result in different eating behaviours, but all occur when sufferers cannot separate their emotions from their eating habits, and they use food to help them control how they are feeling.

What are the effects of eating disorders?

Sufferers of eating disorders are usually in denial of their illness, so family and friends are often more likely to recognise these characteristics.

- Dramatic weight loss/gain in a relatively short period of time
- Wearing baggy clothes to hide their body
- Constantly thinking of weight/food/calories/fat so that diet and food become the central focus of their life and an intense fear of gaining weight
- Making yourself sick, excessive exercise, diet pills, laxative abuse, diuretic (drugs which get rid of excess water) abuse
- Body image disturbance
- (complaining of being fat when they are actually very thin)
- Distorted thinking (when I am thin I will be happy/lovable/successful)
- Frequent trips to the bathroom, especially following meals
- Lying about what and when they have eaten
- Sudden dislike of or fear of eating around others
- Unusual and obsessive food rituals such as shifting the food around on the plate to look eaten or cutting food into tiny pieces



How eating disorders affect the way you feel

Eating disorders can produce:

- Depression, mood swings, anxiety and irritability
- Low self-esteem and poor body image – often people become more withdrawn too
- Increased tiredness and sleep problems
- Poor concentration and memory
- Loss of sex drive

Where to get help?

If you or someone you know has an eating disorder, it is important to act fast. The earlier they receive treatment, the more likely they are to make a full recovery. It is important to seek help from a professional if you suspect that you or someone you know has an eating disorder. It is essential that you see your GP, who can assess your physical and mental well-being and may also suggest a referral for some specialist help, which could include counselling.

How could counselling help me?

Counselling can provide you with the opportunity to talk on a one to one basis with a professionally trained counsellor about the difficulties in your life.

What can I expect?

- What I talk about will be respected and treated in confidence.
- I won't be judged
- I can be myself
- I will be listened to
- My side of the story will be heard
- To learn new ways of dealing with difficult thoughts or feelings

How do I get Counselling?

You can either contact us yourself and we will arrange to meet with you or someone else can contact us on your behalf. This may be your GP, social worker or another person who is concerned about you.

If you are interested in finding out about us you can contact us at the office or visit www.newlifecounselling.net for more information and where you can fill in our online form. We will then be in touch to set up an initial appointment.

Please Note

The advice given in this leaflet is intended to be helpful to most people. It does not replace the direct advice of a healthcare professional or counsellor. It is only a general guide and cannot deal with all possible situations nor can it be specific to any one individual. If you or someone you know needs help please contact your GP as soon as possible to obtain further help.

“we’re listening”

Contact Details

For further information or to make a referral, please contact:

25 Ardoyne Road Belfast BT14 7HX
Tel: 028 9039 1630

Unit 20 North City Business Centre
2 Duncairn Gardens Belfast BT15 2GG
Tel: 028 9074 6184



Hello.

We're New Life Counselling,
we're here to help you.

Do you have an eating disorder?