



# Eating disorders

A parent's guide

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Compiled by the Priory Group for IAPS



# Eating disorders – a parent's guide

The three main types of eating disorders that affect young people are:

- [Anorexia nervosa](#)
- [Bulimia nervosa](#)
- [Binge eating disorder \(BED\)](#)

There are also 'atypical' eating disorders (also known as EDNOS: eating disorders not otherwise specified). These do not fully match the criteria needed to be diagnosed as an eating disorder, but are still a cause for concern.

**ANOREXIA NERVOSA** focuses on starving the body, often causing the individual to become dangerously thin. It is associated with extreme food restriction and a fear of gaining weight, together with an inaccurate body image.

**BULIMIA NERVOSA** is characterised by binge-eating, often eating three or four times a normal amount. This is followed by dietary restriction, self-induced vomiting or taking laxatives to try and avoid putting on weight.

**BINGE EATING DISORDER** is characterised by overeating in binges, often when you are not hungry. Unlike bulimia, you do not make yourself sick or take laxatives after binge eating. In the long term, this can lead to you becoming overweight.

**ATYPICAL EATING DISORDER** is similar to anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, but does not meet the exact diagnostic measures of either.

The symptoms and causes of atypical disorders may be very similar to anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa but the overall clinical picture does not allow for the same diagnosis.

## How common are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions that affect over 725,000 people in the UK. Although anyone can develop an eating disorder, young women are most likely to suffer, particularly in their teenage years. It's important to remember that boys get eating disorders too – up to 10% of young people with eating disorders are male. Eating disorders can have a detrimental impact on young peoples' lives, as well as the lives of those closest to them. Although serious, eating disorders can be treated and recovery is possible. The sooner people receive treatment the better chance they have of recovery and preventing the long term impact on their lives.

## Why do people get eating disorders?

There is no single reason why someone develops an eating disorder. Research suggests that there is some biological vulnerability in people who develop these conditions. Many sufferers also tend to be anxious and perfectionists who struggle to manage strong emotions.

### *A world dominated by appearance*

Teenagers live in a world dominated by appearance, so become more self-conscious around this time of life. Adolescence, with its many challenges, often provides the

trigger for dieting which can lead to the development of an eating disorder. Causes can vary but include school changes, family problems, peer pressure and bullying.

#### *Common behaviours*

People with an eating disorder tend to have low self-esteem and will judge themselves very critically in terms of their physical appearance. They become obsessed with food, weight, shape and day-to-day lives are usually led by thoughts, feelings and behaviours around food and eating. Sufferers use harmful behaviours as a way of coping with these difficult thoughts and feelings, including extreme dieting, vomiting, excessive exercise and binge eating. Many people will feel ashamed of their symptoms and can gradually distance themselves from friends and family.

Although sufferers can sometimes recognise that what they are doing is unhealthy, because of the strong drive to manage food and weight, they find it difficult to stop. Eating disorders are associated with a high incidence of other mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

#### **Further information**

You can read and download the full parent's guide [here](#).

There's also 'Beat', a helpful charity providing information, support groups and resources for people suffering with eating disorders and their families. Click [here](#) for their website.

#### **IAPS is working in partnership with Priory to deliver a teacher conference on Mental Health, 20 March.**

For more details on the full range of Priory Services visit [www.priorygroup.com](http://www.priorygroup.com), call **0800 086 1188** or [click here to make an enquiry](#).

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