

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is aimed at anyone caring for a young person or adult with an eating disorder in Scotland but all the information (apart from some of the organisations listed in the Further information section) apply wherever you live in the UK.

What is an eating disorder?

Eating disorders are mental health conditions marked by an obsession with food, body weight and/or body image. They can affect anyone, but are more prevalent among young women.



Types of eating disorders

- **Anorexia nervosa** is a condition where someone tries to keep their weight as low as possible through limiting food intake, exercising too much or both.
- **Bulimia nervosa** is a condition where someone can lose control and eat lots in a very short period of time (binging) and are then deliberately sick or take laxatives to get rid of food. Someone with bulimia may also restrict food for periods of time and/or carry out too much exercise.
- **Binge eating disorder** is when a person loses control over eating and eats lots of food until they feel uncomfortably full and feel guilty, upset and ashamed.
- **Other specified feeding or eating disorder** is when someone's symptoms do not match those of anorexia, bulimia or binge eating, but it does not mean it is a less serious condition.

The most common is other specified feeding or eating disorder, then binge eating disorder and bulimia. Anorexia is the least common.

“ It is hard to cope at times and as a carer you feel very alone in all of this. ”



Signs and symptoms of an eating disorder

- Dramatic weight loss.
- Not being honest about the amount of food eaten or how much they weigh.
- Exercising obsessively or too much.
- Cutting food into small sizes and taking a long time to eat.
- Avoiding eating with others.
- Going to the bathroom a lot after eating or looking flushed on returning.
- Eating a lot of food very quickly.
- Wearing loose and baggy clothes to hide weight loss.
- Low mood and depression.
- Aggression and violence, this could happen pre, post and during meals especially when eating is being challenged.
- Development regression, where the person may behave in a childlike way rather than in a way appropriate for their age.

If you are worried about someone who may be developing an eating disorder, encourage them to seek help as soon as possible. Although people can and do recover from an eating disorder, they are serious illnesses. If left untreated they can even be fatal.

How to help

Someone with an eating disorder can be secretive and defensive about their eating and weight. They may deny having any problems or illness. Let them know, however, that you are worried about them and encourage them to go to their GP. You can offer to go with them if it will help. Other things that may help:

- Remember you are not to blame.
- Reassure the person you care for that they are not to blame either.
- This is a distressing illness for the person you care for, keep that in mind.

- Avoid discussing weight, shape, food and diets in front of the person.
- Ask the person what you can do to help, maybe setting meal times, putting boundaries in place following meal times, having space and time to talk.
- Remember things do change and people can recover with help.
- Try not to collude with the person, so avoid cooking separate meals, eating in different places in the house or cleaning up vomit.
- Find out as much as you can about the eating disorder.
- Ask the person how they are feeling rather than assuming.

Looking after you

It can feel overwhelming when you are caring for someone with an eating disorder. It affects everyone in the family but not always in the same way. If you are caring for your child, their siblings may feel resentful towards them. You may feel that way too!

Asking for support from your care team can help but so can getting in touch with your local carer service. Information can be found at www.carers.org. There are also young carer services which can provide support to siblings affected by someone in the family with an eating disorder. Take time to look after yourself as well and remember you are doing the best you can.

Further information

Beat Eating Disorders

A UK wide charity which aims to support anyone affected by an eating disorder:
www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group

Formed by carers, people experiencing eating disorders, and professionals: www.sedig.org

CarED

Scottish Government funded online platform with information, videos and other resources developed by NHS Lothian:
www.caredscotland.co.uk



“ Finding the carer centre really helped us feel less alone. They supported us to cope with how we’re feeling. ”



About Carers Trust Scotland

Carers Trust Scotland is part of Carers Trust, a major charity for, with and about carers. We work to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring, unpaid, for a family member or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or addiction problems.

With locally based Network Partners we are able to support carers in the community with information, advice, emotional support, hands on practical help and access to much needed breaks. We offer specialist services for carers of people of all ages and conditions and a range of individually tailored support and group activities.

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