

Eating Disorders

This factsheet will give some background information to what eating distress is and how to go about finding help from local statutory and voluntary sector organisations in Harrow, and useful national organisations. Much of this information is from the website of the Eating Disorders Association

What is an Eating Disorder?

Everyone has different eating habits. We all vary in the foods we like, how much and when we eat. Food is essential for development and health. However some eating habits can be damaging, even life-threatening.

People of different ages and ethnic backgrounds, from both prosperous and low-income families, can suffer from an eating disorder. Men too can suffer from eating disorders, though this is much less common, and so is less often recognised. Eating disorders provide a way to cope with conflict or unhappiness. The focus on food can be an attempt to cope with life and to gain some control.

Different eating disorders

Anorexia nervosa

There are many symptoms, which will not be applicable to everyone, but anorexia sufferers usually severely restrict the amount they eat and drink, sometimes dangerously. They develop a distorted sense of their own body image, believing, against the evidence, that they are overweight. At its most severe, the condition can be life threatening.

Bulimia nervosa

Bulimia involves eating large amounts of food, and then trying to undo the effects by starving, or by vomiting or, less usually, by using laxatives (both known as purging). Frequent vomiting is extremely dangerous and can cause epileptic fits, muscular weakness and heart problems, while taking a lot of laxatives can also cause permanent damage. Bulimia is more common than anorexia, but because a person's weight may remain stable it is not so visible.

Compulsive and binge eating

A compulsive eater will generally eat all day and find it difficult to stop. A person who binge eats consumes a large amount at one sitting. Both are likely to be heavily overweight, and consequently at risk of developing health problems.

Over-exercising

Research has found eating disorders are more common among certain sports. Some athletes may want to keep thin and therefore eat less, or sufferers of anorexia may see exercise as an additional way of keeping thin. However exercising when the body is not receiving enough nutrients can be dangerous.

What causes eating problems?

Eating problems generally do not arise from a single cause. There is usually a combination of factors, which happen in a person's life which lead to someone using this as a method of coping. These factors could be past experiences, current events or pressures, such as health problems, conforming to an ideal, or family problems.

There is debate about the influence of popular media on people's perception of their body image, in that conflicting visual and written messages are presented about ideal body shapes. The Eating Disorders Association is clear that this does not cause eating disorders, but it may influence someone who is feeling vulnerable about themselves or has low self-esteem.

Where can you get help?

It can be very difficult to overcome this problem alone, and the first step is to accept that there is a difficulty. It is then important to see someone with expertise in eating disorders. Your GP can refer you to a specialist counsellor, or if you are severely underweight, to an NHS unit which can support and manage your food intake as well as your distress. There are also private counsellors in Harrow who can assist ([link to counselling services](#)).

If someone is severely underweight, admission to hospital to ensure weight gain may be necessary and even life-saving.

Local Statutory Services

Harrow Outpatient and Daypatient Eating Disorder Service

The service provides specialist daypatient and outpatient care for adult patients (16 years+) with a range of eating problems.'

Northwick Park Mental Health Centre, Watford Road, Harrow, Greater London, HA1 3UJ

Tel: 020 8869 5499

Web: www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/harrow-outpatient-and-daypatient-eating-disorder-service

National Organisations

Inpatient Eating Disorder Service (National)

The national Inpatient Eating Disorder Service provides inpatient treatment for patients at high medical or psychiatric risk and those who are motivated to make changes but have been unable to do so after an effective period of outpatient treatment.

1 Nightingale Place, London SW10 9NG

Tel: 020 8237 2104

Web: www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service/vincent-square-eating-disorder-service

Eating Disorders Unit

Section of Eating Disorders, Department of Psychological Medicine

Institute of Psychiatry, De Crespigny Park, London SE5 8AF

Tel. 020 7848 0778

Web: www.kcl.ac.uk/iop/depts/pm/research/eatingdisorders/index.aspx

Individuals are referred here by their local mental health professional. Information for individuals and carers.

Beat

Wensom House, 103 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR1 1DW

Adult helpline: 0845 634 1414 Email: help@b-eat.co.uk

Youthline: 0845 634 7650 Email: fyp@b-eat.co.uk

web: www.b-eat.co.uk

Support and understanding around eating disorders and contacts for local self help support.

The Institute for Optimum Nutrition

Good nutrition through education and personal consultation

Avalon House, 72 Lower Mortlake Road, London TW9 2JY

tel. 020 8614 7800

web: www.ion.ac.uk

Overeaters Anonymous Great Britain

12 Step fellowship focusing on recovery from compulsive overeating, bulimia and anorexia. Local groups throughout the country

OAGB Ltd., 483 Green Lanes, London, N13 4BS

tel. 07000 784 985

web: www.oagb.org.uk

Young Minds

Committed to improving the mental health of young people

Suite 11, Baden Place, Crosby Row, London, SE1 1YW

Tel: 020 7089 5050 Email: ymentquiries@youngminds.org.uk

Parent Helpline: 08088025544 Email: parents@youngminds.org.uk

web: www.youngminds.org.uk

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

Can provide details of accredited therapists in Harrow

Imperial House, Hornby Street, Bury, Lancashire BL9 5BN

Tel. 0161 705 4304

email: babcp@babcp.com

web: www.babcp.com

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

See website or send A5 SAE for details of local practitioners

BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth LE17 4HB

Tel. 01455 883 300 Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

web: www.bacp.co.uk

National Centre For Eating Disorders

Provide effective help and treatment for sufferers of eating disorders

54 New Road, Esher, Surrey KT10 9NU

Tel: 0845 838 2040

Web: www.eating-disorders.org.uk

Private Sector Services

Cygnnet Hospital Harrow

A private clinic which provides a full therapy programme and one to one sessions. You can self refer.

London Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill, Middlesex HA1 3JL.

Tel: 020 8966 7000

Fax: 020 8864 6092.

Web: www.cygnethealth.co.uk

Websites

Eating Disorders Unit, Institute of Psychiatry

www.eatingresearch.com

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Guidelines for treatment of eating disorders

www.nice.org.uk/CG009

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