



Indicates specific advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Indicates specific advice for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

PARENT FACTSHEET AUGUST 2018

What is it? (signs and symptoms)

An eating disorder is a complex mental illness. Children and adolescents with eating disorders may have disturbed eating behaviours, distorted beliefs about food, eating, body size, shape and weight. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating are common types of eating disorders. These complex disorders are usually influenced by many factors and occur in both boys and girls. Some children and adolescents with an eating disorder may go on to develop other eating disorders or mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Accepting your child has an eating disorder isn't easy, but it's important to seek help and treatment as early as possible. If left untreated, eating disorders can cause serious harm and can be life threatening. With proper treatment and support, your child can recover.

How can the GP help? (treatment and management)

It is important to see a GP who you and your child are comfortable with and who you trust. Your child's GP will work with you and your child to develop a mental health plan. All treatment for children under age 14 requires parental consent. Your GP may also:

- Refer your child to a mental health professional - such as a psychologist or psychiatrist
- Schedule regular follow-ups to check your child's progress
- Talk to your child about how they are feeling - and encourage them to monitor their feelings with a diary
- Check your child's physical health, including dental health
- Identify a healthy weight range and plan for eating regularly and eating enough
- Discuss nutritional treatment - a dietitian can help your child build a healthy relationship with food
- Talk to you and your child about medications - they may be suitable for some, but they are often a short-term option

How can the GP help in future?

- Continue to follow up - and monitor your child's progress and weight
- Talk to your child about their thoughts and feelings - and discuss any changes
- Refer your child to additional services or health professionals if needed
- Check the treatment plan - and change the plan if your child isn't feeling better

When should I call an ambulance?

If you are concerned that your child is in immediate danger, or if there is immediate risk to your child's safety, dial Triple Zero (000) immediately.



Some questions you might like to ask the GP or other mental health professionals

- What can I do to help my child now and over time?
- Would my child benefit from medication?
- How much exercise is appropriate for my child?
- Where can I learn more about eating disorders?
- What might be helpful to tell my child?

What can I do?

Your child's treatment requires a family-based approach. It's important for you to be involved in all treatments and therapies. Encourage your child, but don't put pressure on them. You may wish to contact your child's school and talk to them about the treatment plan. A parenting program can help you learn more about caring for a child with an eating disorder (speak to your GP). Be mindful of the behaviours and the thoughts you express about in front of your child in relation to food, weight, body shape and image. Model normal regular eating to your child.

What supports are available?

Phone and online support

The Butterfly Foundation: **1800 33 4673** (1800 ED HOPE) 8am-midnight (except public holidays) or visit thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

Treatment support

Find local services:

- Armidale, Tamworth, New England, North West
- Central Coast
- Lower Hunter, Maitland, Cessnock, Dungog
- Manning, Great Lakes, Taree
- Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens
- Upper Hunter

Supporting yourself

Here are some helpful parent support websites:

- **Raising Children** raisingchildren.net.au
- **Resourcing Parents** resourcingparents.nsw.gov.au
- **Families NSW** families.nsw.gov.au
- **HIPPY** hippyaustralia.org.au

Further reading

Butterfly Foundation

www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

Translated resources

- **Mental Health in Multicultural Australia**
What is an eating disorder? mhima.org.au 
- **Transcultural Mental Health Centre**
dhi.health.nsw.gov.au 

Centre for Clinical Interventions

cci.health.wa.gov.au

Eating Disorders Programs

- **John Hunter Children's Hospital.** Inpatient program for children and young people aged 12 to 18 years with eating disorders. Ask your GP about a referral.
- **John Hunter Children's Hospital: Eating Disorders Paediatric Outpatient Clinic.** Provides review and consultation. Talk to your GP about a referral.
- **Central Coast Eating Disorders Outpatient Service - Early Intervention.** Offers assessment and advice on treatment options for patients of all ages. Talk to your GP about a referral.
- **Central Coast Eating Disorders Outpatient Service - Day Program.** A recovery program lasting 3 to 6 months. Offers group and individual support to reduce the impact of the eating disorder on daily living. Talk to your GP about a referral.

Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders

www.feast-ed.org

Mental Health Carers NSW

www.mentalhealthcarers.nsw.org