

UNDERSTANDING EATING DISORDERS

WHAT ARE EATING DISORDERS?

A guide for parents & carers

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions that affect relationships with food, eating, and body image. They are complex conditions that can seriously impact both physical and emotional well-being, including:

- **Anorexia Nervosa : Key features:** Intense fear of gaining weight, severe food restriction, distorted body image.
- **Bulimia Nervosa : Key features:** Cycles of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviours such as vomiting, fasting, or excessive exercise.
- **Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) : Key features:** Extreme pickiness or avoidance of food that leads to nutritional deficiency but not related to body image concerns.
- **Binge Eating Disorder (BED) : Key features:** Recurrent episodes of eating large quantities of food in a short period, often with a sense of loss of control.
- **Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder (OSFED) : Key features:** Symptoms that cause distress and impairment but don't fully meet criteria for other disorders.
- **PICA: Key features:** Eating non-food items (e.g., chalk, paper, dirt).
- **Rumination Disorder: Key features:** Repeated regurgitation, re-chewing, or re-swallowing of food, not due to a medical condition.

EARLY SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- Avoiding meals or eating in private
- Obsessive calorie counting or food control
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Excessive exercise
- Frequent bathroom visits after meals
- Changes in mood, secrecy, irritability

HOW TO SUPPORT:

- Stay calm and non-judgmental
- Avoid focusing on weight or appearance
- Focus on how they *feel*, not what they eat
- Use language like: “I’ve noticed...”, “I care about you...”, “You’re not in trouble...”
- Keep mealtimes as low-pressure as possible

WHERE TO GET HELP:

The Village NB resources:

<https://thevillagenb.org.au/category/disordered-eating/>

- **Butterfly Foundation** – 1800 33 46 73
- **Adolescent ED Inpatient Program (Westmead)**
- **InsideOut Institute** – national ED research/treatment centre
<https://insideoutinstitute.org.au>
- **Mental Health Line** – 1800 011 511
- **Eating Disorder Hub – Frenchs Forest**
<https://www.eatingdisorderhub.com.au>

WHAT TO AVOID:

- Don’t shame or guilt the child
- Don’t use phrases like “You look fine” or “Just eat”
- Avoid weight talk (about anyone)