

Eating problems



Food plays an important part in our lives, and most of us will spend time thinking about what we eat. As a result, we will all have different relationships with food and different eating habits. For example, you might eat loads one day, feel less hungry on another or go through periods of wanting to eat more or less healthily. **This does not, however, mean that you have an eating problem. Changing your eating habits now and again is normal.**

If, however, you find yourself heavily focusing on controlling what you eat or how much of it, or have urges to eat and then make yourself sick, these could be signs that you're having difficulties that need to be shared and talked through. If you're struggling with eating, it may be because something doesn't feel right in other areas of your life, particularly if you're feeling worried, stressed or feeling that things around you are out of control. Eating problems are not just about food. They can be about difficult things and painful feelings, which you may be finding hard to talk about, face or resolve. It could also be that you feel that you must look a certain way, or be a certain weight from what you see online and in the media, which may not be good for your body.



Here are some examples of unhealthy attitudes to food which you might be experiencing:

- loss of appetite
- eating when not feeling hungry
- obsessing about what your body looks like (e.g. being too fat, or not muscly enough)
- eating only certain types of things or following diets with no research
- being afraid of putting on weight
- dramatic weight loss or gain
- making yourself be sick
- no longer enjoying eating with others or eating out
- leaving the table quickly (to be sick or hide food)
- feeling secretive about what you're eating
- feeling self-conscious about eating in front of others

Follow this link to check out the Young Minds website for Rebecca's story on her journey

<https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/recovering-from-anorexia-rebeccas-mental-health-journey/>

If any of the attitudes/behaviours outlined above are impacting on your everyday life, it's a good idea to talk to someone about how you're feeling. **Anyone, regardless of their age, gender, race or weight, can be affected.** It is understandable, however, that telling someone will feel hard. You are not alone in how you're thinking as other young people are also going through similar difficulties. There will be lots of adults in school you can talk to or who will be able to direct you to the support you need.



As well as speaking to someone you trust, talking to your GP for advice will also be helpful if you have any concerns or questions. Sometimes learning to eat normally again can be challenging, so your GP can help you get the right support.

So what are the recommendations for teenagers when it comes to healthier eating/lifestyle habits?

Your teenage years are a time of growth and development, so a balanced diet is important, especially when studying at school or college. Food is our fuel, and without it, it is harder to concentrate. So, when thinking about what to eat, this means:

- Having a variety of regular balanced meals where you can, rather than eating too much of one thing, especially foods that are processed or higher in fat, sugar and salt content

Remember, this is not to say that these foods should never be eaten. We deserve to enjoy these foods too, just that we need to take in to consideration how much of them we're having.

- Eat more fruit and vegetables
- Try to eat breakfast



- Aim to drink six to eight glasses of water every day. However, it can also include other fluids like low fat milk and sugar-free drinks



- Avoid consuming too much caffeine, whether it is in the form of energy drinks or coffee

- Completing some physical activity - could be in many different forms, for example; going for a bike ride, going for a walk or a run, completing a home workout, dancing, playing football, basketball or netball etc.



- Getting a good night's rest!



For tips on reducing feelings of anxiety, low mood and managing sleep; make sure you check out our other pages where there will be lots of information!

Other helpful websites

Beat provides Helplines for adults and young people offering support and information about eating difficulties. These Helplines are free to call from all phones.

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/support-services/helplines>

Kooth is an online mental wellbeing community. You can access free, safe and anonymous support.

<https://www.kooth.com>