



**Sport
In Mind**

**British
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EATING PROBLEMS

What are eating problems?

An eating problem is when someone has a relationship with food that they find difficult. Many people think that someone with an eating problem will be over- or underweight. People might also think that certain weights are linked to certain eating problems. Neither of these assumptions is true. Anyone can experience eating problems. This is regardless of age, gender, weight or background.

An eating problem is not the same as an eating disorder:

- An **eating disorder** is a medical diagnosis. This diagnosis is based on eating patterns and includes medical tests on weight, blood and body mass index (BMI).
- An **eating problem** is any relationship with food that someone finds difficult. This can be just as difficult to live with as a diagnosed eating disorder.

Eating problems are not just about food. They can be about difficult things and painful feelings. These feelings might be challenging to express, to face or to resolve. Focusing on food can be a way of hiding these feelings and problems.

Someone might feel:

- ashamed or guilty
- tired much of the time
- depressed or anxious
- scared of other people finding out.

Someone might find that:

- controlling food or eating has become the most important thing in life
- it feels difficult to concentrate on work, studying or hobbies
- they want to avoid socialising, dates and restaurants or eating in public
- their appearance is changing or has changed
- they are bullied or teased about food and eating
- it feels hard to be spontaneous, to travel or to go anywhere new
- they develop short- or long-term physical health problems
- they have to leave school/college or work, or stop doing what they enjoy.

Eating problems and other mental health problems

Many people with eating problems also have other mental health problems or illnesses. Some common experiences include:

- dislike of certain foods
- depression
- forms of self-harm – eating problems can be seen as a form of self-harm, and other types of self-harm can occur too
- anxiety
- obsessive-compulsive disorders
- issues with self-esteem and body image
- body dysmorphic disorder, which is an anxiety disorder linked to body image.

Food is one of many mediums through which anxiety, depression or obsessive-compulsive behaviours can be expressed.