

Disordered eating and exercise.

INFORMATIONAL RESOURCE

Introduction

This resource is designed to provide timely and non-judgmental support to anyone concerned about their relationship with food and/or exercise, and for those seeking guidance in supporting someone they have concerns for.

Experiencing a disordered relationship with food and having a diagnosed eating disorder are distinct situations and this resource aims to provide information and advice on supporting both.



Accessing help

Local services in Bristol for eating difficulties are highly competent with rapid response times. If you, or someone close to you need support, please choose the most appropriate option below; [Somerset and Wessex Eating Disorder Association \(SWEDA\)](#)

SWEDA are a local charity supporting people affected by disordered eating behaviors and eating disorders and should be considered the first point of contact for anyone **without a diagnosed eating disorder**. SWEDA has been pro-recovery and supporting those affected by eating disorders since 1992. They provide a broad selection of support services and are committed to promoting equal access to services, recognising that experiences of eating disorders may vary across different groups and communities.

You can self-refer to SWEDA and access support, advice and further signposting if necessary. Click [here](#) to contact SWEDA.

Access to **local NHS support services** is best achieved through your GP. We recognise that this could be a scary step to take and the guidance below from the charity Beat Eating Disorders (BEAT) will help to give you all the information on what to expect and how to prepare.

[Going to the doctor - Beat \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](https://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

For those with **existing or emerging suspected eating disorders** requiring support from primary care services. Access to STEPs is made through referral from your GP, using the information in the point above.

[STEPs Eating Disorder Community Team](#)

And remember that if **you, or anyone else needs urgent help**, for any reason, then please access local urgent support services [here](#).



■ Signs and symptoms of disordered eating

Some of the key indicators that you, or someone you may know, could be at risk include:

- **Rigid rules and rituals around mealtimes**
Timing, environment, constituent ingredients
- **Hyperfixation on food labelling**
Macronutrients, calorie counting, and 'Eating Clean'
- **Obsessed with exercise and the gym**
- **Lack of libido**
- **Becoming stressed or upset if they miss a workout**
- **Avoiding social situations that include meals out or would interrupt their routine**
- **Becoming quieter, isolated, and withdrawn**
- **Wearing baggy clothes**
Potentially hiding their body
- **Mood changes**
Mood swings or seeming numb, apathetic or detached
- **Feeling cold all the time**

*Whilst these are common signs of emerging difficulties, it is important to understand this list is not a diagnostic criteria or exhaustive. Individual experience will always have unique presentation, so if you are concerned about yourself or someone else, then please make use of the 'accessing help' section above. Further information on the signs and symptoms, with reference to specific disorders, can be found from the **National Eating Disorder Association** [here](#).*



Tips for supporting someone

These tips have been curated by people with lived experience of eating disorders, with five key themes:

INCLUDE

Having an eating disorder can be very isolating, especially as most social events and occasions are centered around food and drinks. This means that those who experience challenge with their relationship with food are often excluded.

Try to think of ways everyone can be included. My (student advocate) favorite Bristol ideas include:

- Go for a walk together
- Board games evening
- Craft activity like pottery
- Go for a study date
- Yoga/Pilates sessions

VALIDATE

Unless you have also lived with an eating disorder, it can be very challenging to understand what someone may be going through. An eating disorder is a scary and lonely experience, so try to sympathise with them and acknowledge that you know things are hard, and that you want to help.

DON'T CHANGE

When someone is starting recovery there is significant change happening in their lives. They will likely have appointments with doctors, dietitians, and therapists. These can be daunting, overwhelming, and exhausting. Their illness can become their identity and what is focused on, but remember that they are still your friend. Try and treat them the same way you would treat every other person, help them break away and become their old self again.

BE KIND

An eating disorder is a brutal illness where a person is often flooded with feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy. Often, these are a coping mechanism to deal with challenging circumstances, emotions, or trauma. You never know what someone is going through, so be patient and remember that the person you are supporting is unwell.

AVOID TALKING ABOUT THEIR APPEARANCE

If you want to give compliments to make someone feel good about themselves, consider complimenting their beautiful personality, kindness, humour, work ethic, determination, or strength. Compliments don't have to focus on appearance, and talking about someone's body or appearance can be damaging. This tip can really help someone in their recovery as it helps to remind them they are so much more than their illness.



Self-help resources

Often, getting more information or talking to someone about your concerns can be a helpful first step. These helplines, forums, and services provide confidential support from trained professionals and are worth exploring for yourself, or sharing with others.

HELPLINES

SWEDA

[SWEDA Mindline helpline - sweda \(swedauk.org\)](https://swedauk.org)

BEAT

[Helplines - Beat \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](https://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

FORUMS/LIVE CHAT

BEAT

[Community Home Page \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](https://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

TRUSTED APPS

EATING DISORDER SUPPORT APP

[Eating Disorder Support App - Expert Self Care](#)

GROUP WORKSHOPS

OFF THE RECORD

[Shameless - OTR \(otrbristol.org.uk\)](https://otrbristol.org.uk)

Off the Record is a local charity that provides a suite of services and workshops for young people affected by low self-esteem, body image difficulties, anxiety, and compulsive behaviours.

Final thoughts

Sport, Exercise and Health is an inclusive and caring provider that aims to create a positive and enriching experience for our whole community.

We recognise that eating disorders are mental illnesses and not defined by weight or body shape. Disordered relationships with food and/or exercise are experienced by people from all walks of life, and do not discriminate - and neither do we.

This resource has been co-created with current students recovering from eating disorders, with the sole aim of better supporting our students.

Given the stigma and discrimination that exists around disordered relationships with food and exercise, we want you to understand that you are welcome as part of our community, whatever difficulties you are facing.

