

## Eating Disorders

People experience an eating disorder when their beliefs about food, weight and body image lead to unhealthy patterns of eating and/or exercising. Eating disorders impact not only the person experiencing the eating disorder, but also their family and friends.

How a person develops an eating disorder is very individual, often with many different factors contributing including biological, psychological, environmental and social.

Types of eating disorders include:

- **Anorexia nervosa:** restricting how much is eaten, leading to a very low body weight. Seeing their body size or shape in a distorted way
- **Bulimia nervosa:** binge eating large amounts of food in a short period of time. Then trying to make up or reverse this with behaviours such as vomiting or exercise
- **Binge eating disorder:** binge eating large amounts of food repetitively without trying to make up for it, often feels a loss of control, shame, distress and guilt afterwards
- **Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder:** avoiding certain foods based on the sensory characteristics such as the smell, appearance or texture. This can lead to unintentional weight loss and other issues with nutrition and physical health.



### How may eating disorders be treated?

Treatment for eating disorders may involve; counselling, nutrition education, family support and education, medication and person-centered stepped care plans.

### How can I support my child after leaving the Emergency Department?

1. **Follow through with the Discharge and Safety Plan** recommendations provided by Emergency Department staff. If you are not clear on details, ask staff to write them down.
2. **Inform your child's school** before they return to school. Explain the Discharge and Safety Plan recommendations you received at the Emergency Department. The school will be able to put additional supports in place to help keep your child safe.
3. **Watch out for signs** that your child's unhealthy patterns of eating and/or exercising may be increasing (see above)
4. **Seek professional support** for longer term care and support. A general practitioner or school counsellor can discuss options or call the Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511.
5. **Acknowledging your own feelings**, consider talking to somebody supportive.

### For advice and support contact:

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800    Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

**If you have immediate concerns about your child's safety:  
call 000 or take them to the Emergency Department**

## Things that can help at school

By informing and keeping the school up to date you can help your child adjust back into school life and keep on track with their education. Your child's school will communicate and work with you, your child and support services to support your child in school. This may include:

- school specific safety planning
- return to school planning
- identifying a support person
- consideration of reasonable adjustments to the student's program
- ongoing monitoring and support
- accessing specialist support services.

Regular communication between school and parents and carers is essential to ensure that your child is receiving the best care and support.



## Things that can help at home

- **Use your child's Safety Plan**, including the list of supportive people your child can talk to.
- **Remain calm and supportive**, your child needs a caring space and the support of family.
- **Be open to listening to your child** if they want to talk about their thoughts and feelings, encourage strategies they could use to manage these thoughts and feelings.
- **Find ways to enhance your child's self-esteem** and acknowledge their positive qualities.
- **Keep occupied** to keep your child's mind off stress. Plan things to do together to occupy free time.
- **Try deep breathing** and relaxation exercises, to help you and your child feel relaxed and reduce the focus on strong emotions.
- **Ask for help** if you have any concerns about your or your child's safety.

## For more information

This sheet is for education purposes only, please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure that this information is right for your child.

Reachout



<https://au.reachout.com/>

Project Air



<https://www.uow.edu.au/project-air/>

Lifeline



<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

**Need an Interpreter?** Interpreters are available if you need help to communicate with staff. The service is free and confidential. We will book the interpreter for you. You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 if you need to speak to someone before your appointment.

**Need an Aboriginal Health Worker?** An Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) advocates for the needs of consumers who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. They can provide support and information to help you. Tell staff you would like to speak to an AHW, or let them know if there is an AHW you would like us to contact.