

UNDERSTANDING EATING DISORDERS: WHEN BEING HEALTH CONSCIOUS BECOMES UNHEALTHY

It can be useful to understand what it is that distinguishes healthy eating and fitness practices from those that may be considered less healthy. When might our thoughts, feelings and behaviours in relation to the food we consume and what our bodies look like be considered unhealthy? What exactly is an eating disorder?

According to the official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-V) which covers the range of mental health concerns, an eating disorder is characterised by “persistent disturbance of eating or eating-related behaviour resulting in altered consumption or absorption of food that significantly impairs physical health or psychosocial functioning”. In other words, eating disorders tend to be characterised by someone’s relationship with food, and this relationship has a negative impact on their physical health and interactions with family and friends.

The two most commonly known types of eating disorders are Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. Both disorders typically first occur in adolescence and are ten times more likely to occur in women than men (DSM-5). That said, both men and women, the young and old, can be affected by eating disorders. It is important to be aware of the warning signs, and to understand the difference between a healthy

focus on diet and exercise, and an unhealthy one.

It is important to note that having one or even a couple of warning signs does not necessarily mean someone has an eating disorder. If you notice any change to your body weight or your health (or a friend’s weight or health), please consult a doctor. It’s always a good idea to seek professional advice.

Some warning signs to look out for – this is by no means a comprehensive list – include sudden or rapid weight loss, dieting, ritualistic eating, evidence of binge eating, excessive exercise, and frequent avoidance of meal times at social events. It is important to remember that people may show these signs but not necessarily have an eating disorder, and only a trained health professional can make a diagnosis.

If you or someone you know is affected by an eating disorder, please visit us at the **UTS Counselling Service**:

<http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/health-and-wellbeing/counselling-service-and-self-help>

The service is free and confidential. To make an appointment, please call Reception on **9514 1177** during office hours. Most importantly we would also encourage you or your friend/family member to consult a doctor and at UTS we

have the **Health Service** where you can book appointments with either male or female general practitioners:
<http://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/health-and-wellbeing/medical-service> For a medical appointment please call reception on **9514 1177**. For support outside of business hours, please phone **Lifeline** on **13 11 14** for free and confidential support.

Online Resources and Additional Reading:

The following websites contain comprehensive information about eating disorders, as well as treatment options.

[CCI Guide to Overcoming Disordered Eating](#) – A nine-module, self-guided program designed to provide information about disordered eating and equip the individual with strategies to change behaviours.

[Butterfly Foundation](#) – The Butterfly Foundation is an organisation that aims to help prevent and treat eating disorders, and to

support those who suffer from eating disorders and their carers. Their website contains links to a helpline.

[Centre for Eating and Dieting Disorders \(CEDD\)](#) – This website offers information about eating disorders, low-cost online learning and online therapy for eating disorders, and a search function that allows you to find health specialists in NSW.

[Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous](#) – A program of recovery for overeaters and undereaters based on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

[Overeaters Anonymous \(OA\)](#) - OA offers a program of recovery to help people abstain from overeating. Information about the OA program, upcoming workshops and meeting locations can be found on the site.