

Mental Health & Wellbeing at the Bar

Eating Disorders



Wellbeing
at the Bar

Eating Disorders

In 2015, over 725,000 people in the UK reported having been affected by an eating disorder¹. Food may be used as a control mechanism in a life that has become hectic, unhappy or out of control in some way.

Eating disorders are very serious and can be considered as a form of psychological self-harm. Do not be disheartened. This is a mental health issue that can be successfully treated.

There are three main types: Anorexia nervosa, Bulimia nervosa and Binge eating.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder, either from suicide or other medical complications associated with the illness. Anorexia occurs when a person does not allow themselves access to food which provides the required energy and nutrition for a healthy life. This condition is not always connected to dieting, and may be rooted in deep seated feelings of self-hatred or low self-esteem.

Bulimia Nervosa

This condition is characterised by behaviour which includes binge eating (eating large amounts of food at one sitting) frequently followed by purging (getting rid of the food just eaten). Weight loss or gain is not noticeable and therefore the condition can go on for many months or years without loved ones or work colleagues being aware.

Binge Eating

Binge eating is when a person feels compelled to overeat large amounts of food in a short space of time.

How do I talk to someone about my eating disorder?

1. Find your confidant – choose the person you feel most comfortable opening up to. It does not have to be someone within Chambers or your place of work. Some people might prefer to talk to someone that does not know them or their situation.
2. Good timing - try to find a time that suits you both, and when you can discuss it privately. Also take into account any looming deadlines, or potential conflicts in your schedules.
3. Prepare for others' reactions – This is a difficult conversation to have. People may be pleased that you feel comfortable enough to open up, but they may be shocked, upset or dismissive. Try and give people the time to process it, as they may be worried about the impact of their words and actions on you going forward.

¹ [The Costs of Eating Disorders - Social, Health and Economic Impacts](#) report (2015)

So, I know I may have a problem. Now what?

It is quite difficult to overcome your feelings and manifestation of self-harm on your own. As well as speaking to someone you trust about this issue, it is important that you also seek professional support and help as soon as possible.

Some avenues to consider are:

- GP – your GP will evaluate your weight in comparison to other factors such as your age and height. Your GP may also ask about any concerns you have about your body, and openly discuss your eating habits. It may also be necessary to test your blood, and perhaps refer you to an eating disorder specialist.
- Self-Help Courses – your GP may refer you to self-help courses. Public peer to peer support forums available to discuss your issues and meet others who have experienced the same challenges.
- Online support - You may like to approach some of the Peer support groups online. This can be a good way to maintain your anonymity, while still getting the help you need.
- Books – there are a number of books on this issue. It may be useful to read up on self-harm, and also explore other ways of coping.

How do I start a conversation with someone I suspect has an eating disorder?

1. Think – before you approach someone, think. Do not assume, but think of kind things you will say so that you are not caught off-guard if they are defensive. Remember that they may be dealing with a number of stressful factors (pupillage applications/pupillage), and the last thing you want to do is add to their burden with any judgment. Consider are you best placed to speak to them, or is there someone more appropriate who knows them better or can relate in a more effective way.
2. Timing – try to find a time that suits you both, and when you can discuss it privately. Also take into account of their schedule, and any looming deadlines.
3. Be patient – they may not feel comfortable opening up from the outset. Do bear in mind that this might be the first time they have to confront their issue, so be patient.

Where can I find out more about eating disorders?

You can find out more about tackling and beating eating disorders by contacting;

- <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/>
- Free helpline: 0345 634 1414