

Anorexia Nervosa

Living with anorexia means that you try to keep your weight as low as possible. This could be not eating enough food, exercising too much, or both.

Anorexia may mean you have a distorted view of your physical body, and that you need to make drastic changes to your weight.

What are the symptoms of anorexia?

- The most obvious feature is a low body weight; technically speaking, it's a body weight of less than 85 % of what would be healthy for a person's size. A healthy Body Mass Index is between 19 and 25. A Body Mass Index of less than 17.5 would indicate the presence of Anorexia
- People with Anorexia fear putting on any weight even though they are very underweight
- Often sufferers deny how underweight they are and tend to place their self-worth on their body weight and shape
- The absence of three consecutive periods

There are two broad types of anorexia:

- Restricting type, which means not eating the right amount of food to maintain healthy body weight
- Binge eating / purging type, which means regularly bingeing, then starving, then 'purging' by vomiting, or getting rid of the food another way

Prevalence: the prevalence of people who meet the full criteria of Anorexia is low at 0.5% to 1.0% of the population. Sufferers are typically female although the number of males with the disorder is increasing. The typical age of onset for Anorexia is in adolescence.

Anorexia and your health

Living with anorexia, you may notice changes to both your physical and mental health, such as:

- Feeling tired and lethargic
- Having a weak bladder
- Feeling bloated or constipated
- Reduction In the quality of the hair, skin and nails
- Anaemia
- Cholesterol level increases
- Excess hair on the face, arms and body
- Loss of bone mass (osteopenia and osteoporosis)
- Periods may stop and your libido may reduce
- Organ damage, as your body starts to break down tissue as a result of the fat stores being depleted
- Abnormal heart rhythm and heart failure

Emotional Problems in Eating Disorders:

Depression, anxiety and low self-esteem are common difficulties. Starvation lowers mood and an individual's ability to think clearly. Interest in relationships decreases and loneliness and feelings of isolation and pessimism increase. Obsessive compulsive problems and distorted, negative thoughts and feelings about shape and weight are common. It is crucial to remember that typically, all of the above start to improve as eating gets under control.

Tips for managing anorexia

- Design a diet plan that meets your body's nutritional needs
- Start with small meals and foods that feel safe and then gradually introduce larger meals and more risky food - normal eating does not have to resume immediately
- Start eating at regular intervals throughout the day
- If eating is too difficult, try high calorie drinks
- Once you start eating you may find your appetite returns, and you feel very hungry, which can feel overwhelming. Your hunger will be reduced if you eat small and regular meals
- If you feel anxious about gaining weight, ask yourself what being slim would give you, then recognise that all these things are in your grasp now
- Recognise that the shape of your body is partly determined by genetics
- When you feel worried about your weight ask someone you trust for their opinion

Anorexia can affect both men and women of all ages, but the condition generally appears around adolescence (ages between 10 and 24).

You can find out more about Anorexia nervosa from the NHS website

[nhs.uk/conditions/anorexia/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anorexia/)

What Lies Behind Eating Disorders?

Eating Disorders: A Biological Basis

Research suggests that there may be a biological basis for eating disorders, for example, those with a mother or sister who have an eating disorder are twelve times more likely to develop one themselves.

Personality And Eating Disorders

Perfectionism is a common trait in people with eating disorders. Often people with eating disorders have achieved a lot but do not recognise this, instead they tend to see themselves as worthless and inadequate. They tend to see things in 'black and white', or as either 'all good' or 'all bad'.

Other Factors That Are Sometimes Involved

The family – some people with eating disorders feel smothered by their families, others feel abandoned and not cared for. Often people with eating disorders have had rigid upbringings with high demands placed on them. To escape these pressures, people sometimes turn to food and define their self-worth by their weight.

Social pressures – very image conscious friends and romantic partners can create an environment that can encourage an eating disorder.

The media – the media is not always very helpful, as it tends to portray happy, successful people as young, slim and attractive.

How we can help you

When you're referred to us we'll arrange an assessment appointment with you. We'll talk with you about your experiences and why you think your eating habits have changed.

Depending on your needs, we may offer a range of treatment options to support you.

Group Work

The therapeutic groups run by the service are for people with different eating disorders which can surprise some people. The purpose of these groups is to help you to explore what is behind your eating disorder and to help you to think about changes that may help you.

First Steps Group

This is a six-week group which provides you with support and a better understanding of the steps you will need to take to start your recovery from an eating disorder. It includes nutritional information, practical ideas and educational work about the psychological, medical and social impacts that an eating disorder has on your life, as well as those around you. The group explores what you are gaining from your eating disorder and what you might feel afraid of losing, in addition to thinking about what you may gain from changing your eating patterns.

Self Esteem Group

Our eight-week group sessions can help you understand how low self-esteem may have developed and how it's maintained. It's an opportunity to try out different ways of building your self-confidence and experiment with assertive behaviour to gain a more positive relationship with yourself.

The Day Programme

The day programme can be helpful for people who have recently been discharged from a hospital for their eating disorder, or for those who require more intensive help in managing their eating difficulties. This treatment includes a range of therapeutic groups such as Body Image, Self Esteem and Nutrition which are aimed to support you in addressing difficulties concerning your relationship with food, eating and your body. There are also structured, supported mealtimes and each member receives their own individualised set of treatment aims as part of their care plan.

Individual Therapy

One to one therapy is available. People are often in two minds about recovering from their eating disorder because it can feel that the disorder brings advantages as well as disadvantages; therapy will give you the opportunity to explore these concerns. The sessions are likely to focus upon what may have triggered your eating problems in the first place and exploring different ways of handling problems. One key area to this will be altering the patterns of eating that have led to your body becoming unwell.

Dietetic Support

Dietetic support can be useful for ensuring that you have accurate information about your body's dietary requirements. A Dietician also helps you to alter your eating patterns in a way that is most manageable for you.

Emotional Problems in Eating Disorders

Depression, anxiety and low self-esteem are common difficulties.

Starvation lowers mood and an individual's ability to think clearly.

Interest in relationships decreases and loneliness and feelings of isolation and pessimism increase. Obsessive compulsive problems and distorted, negative thoughts and feelings about shape and weight are common. It is crucial to remember that typically, all of the above start to improve as eating gets under control.

Accessing our service

Following your assessment at our clinic, you and the Clinician will look at some of the options available so that the most suitable service for you can be found.

Hospital Admission

If your eating disorder has placed your health in severe danger, a hospital admission may be necessary. This is not often required but is vital for people with a very low body weight where weight gain is immediately necessary to ensure survival.

During your stay in hospital you will be given a diet plan designed by a Dietician to help you gain weight in a way that is manageable and safe for you.

Often during your first week you will be confined to bed rest to minimise the pressure you place on your body whilst you are so unwell, the duration of which will be determined by your rate of recovery. Your stay in hospital will involve regular weighing and possibly supervised meals to help with your return to health.

The Home Treatment Team

The Home Treatment Team is a community team providing visits to patients in their own homes and hospital settings across the whole of Berkshire.

If you are admitted to hospital, the team will provide support to both you and your family during this difficult time and will continue to work with you to find the most appropriate care once you have left hospital. If you are at home, the team can provide emotional support, meal support and therapeutic activities such as food shopping and cooking to support you in making changes to your eating habits as well as the aspects of daily living that are disrupted by your eating disorder.

Further support

NHS

You can find more information about anorexia, and other eating disorders, including symptoms, causes and support, from the NHS website

[nhs.uk/conditions/anorexia/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anorexia/)

Women's Aid

Helpline for domestic violence. Can arrange contact with safe houses in your area - 0808 2000 247

Samaritans

Support for any issue - 08457 90 90 90 (24hr)

Talk to Frank

Advice & info on drug (mis)use - 0300 123 6600 (24hr)

Drinkline

Advice and help for alcohol (mis)use - 0300 123 1110

Marie Stopes

Abortion and pregnancy advice & counselling service – 0845 300 8090 (24hr)

Community Mental Health Teams

Bracknell 01344 823333

Newbury 01635 292020

Reading 0118 960 5612

Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team—0118 960 5999

Overnight crisis service – 0800 783 9505

Slough 01753 690950

Windsor, Ascot & Maidenhead 01628 640200

Wokingham 0118 9890707

The CMHT can offer help in an immediate crisis

Urgent Care 0300 365 99 99 (24 hour line)

How to contact us

If you need to contact us
or require further information...

Reading: **0118 929 6417**

St Mark's Hospital: **01753 638 883**

www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

