



Are you caring for a loved one with an eating disorder?

Here are warm words and support from other parent/carers to help you care for someone with eating challenges.

You are not alone.



What is the definition of a Carer?

Are you living with or involved with someone who is experiencing an eating disorder? If you are, you are an informal carer for your loved one.

You may not have identified yourself as a carer so this may all be new to you. An informal carer can be anyone whether you are a parent, partner, friend, family member or work colleague. We hope this leaflet gives you helpful information.

What is an Eating Disorder?

A serious mental illness that can take different forms and varying lengths of time to recover from. The vast majority of people recover and it is the most likely outcome, although it can still take a long time.

Eating disorders can affect anyone at any time, regardless of race, age or their gender identity. Eating disorders and recovery will look different for everyone.

Early help is really important to recovery. Often eating disorders are hidden or kept a secret. However, there are important signs and symptoms that parent/carers can look out for.

[NHS England's website lists the following:](#)

- Dramatic weight loss
- Lying about how much they've eaten, when they've eaten, or their weight
- Eating a lot of food very fast going to the bathroom a lot after eating, exercising a lot
- Avoiding eating with others, cutting food into small pieces or eating very slowly
- Wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss

Other symptoms/signs may be: Avoiding socialising when food may be involved, unnatural focus on what others are eating, needing to know calorie content of all foods, new interest in cooking and recipes but avoiding eating the food, repetitive requests for reassurance about appearance.

Eating disorders are about controlling emotions and feelings, and are complex.

Supporting someone with an eating disorder can be worrying. You may be feeling overwhelmed. This can be a long illness so it is really important to look after yourself.

Myth:

Your loved one will be like this forever

Truth:

It may be in their life for now, however recovery is possible

Myth: This is a new illness

Truth: It is not a new or modern illness. There is historical evidence of the illness

Myth: It is a girl's eating disorder

Truth: Men get eating disorders too

Myth: You can tell someone has an eating disorder by looking at them

Truth: Individuals with eating disorders come in all shapes and sizes

What are the key messages?

1. Eating disorders are about feelings not food
2. Parents/carers are not to blame. Many factors contribute to eating disorders like genetics, brain structure, cultural elements, reactions to trauma and biology etc
3. It is important to look after yourself
4. If you get offered help, take it. You do not have to go through this alone
5. Your loved one may have to do it on their own sometimes, know when to step back
6. Stay positive and never give up hope, recovery is the most likely outcome
7. Your loved one is still your loved one, they are still in there.
8. They must know that your love for them is unconditional
9. It's ok to make mistakes – learn and be open
10. Aim for good enough caring, not perfect caring. Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself



“They alone can do it, but they can’t do it alone”

- Janet Treasure

What you can do as carers?

1. Parents/carers are part of the solution. There is a lot that you can do to help. Recovery significantly increases with knowledgeable carers and a calm and warm environment
2. Maintain normality as much as possible so that you are a good example. Keep doing your hobbies and the things you enjoy
3. You always have a voice. You can see the GP yourself to convey your concerns about your loved one
4. Focus on the here and now
5. Show empathy and validate – for example tell your loved one that you can see how hard things are, acknowledge and encourage their efforts and try not to criticise or give advice
6. Enjoy and celebrate the little things. They often mean more. Stay positive and upbeat
7. Keep lines of communication open – don't make it all about the eating disorder
8. It can help you all to set clear and consistent boundaries
9. Be open to connecting with people who have similar experiences. Support groups can be an invaluable. Share the burden with others
10. Listening is really important. It may not seem like much, it shows that you care and in doing this it can help your loved one understand their feelings

Where can your loved one get help?

It's important to support your loved one to seek help as early as possible.

- Encourage your loved one to see their GP or to contact a voluntary organisation
- Encourage your loved one to seek online support from appropriate resources
- Try not to be put off by professionals if they do not understand, or if your experience isn't as positive as you had hoped. If you have a negative experience be prepared to ask to see a mental health professional, a different GP or a different therapist/professional

A list of some support services for your loved one

- Authors of books: Hope Virgo, Emma Scrivener, Eva Musby, Tina McGuff
 - [Beat](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/)
 - [PEDS](https://www.pedsupport.co.uk/)
 - [CPSL Mind](https://www.cpslmind.org.uk)
 - [Centre 33](https://centre33.org.uk/)
 - [Keep your head](https://www.keep-your-head.com/)
 - [NHS CPFT](https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/)
 - [Lived Experience Leaflet](https://linktr.ee/SUNnetworkEatingDisorderInfo)
- NHS First Response Service 111 option 2 (Crisis support)

Service information

Professionals you may come across on your loved one's journey through the eating disorder services include GP, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Dietician/Nutritionist, Counsellor, Mental Health practitioner, Nurse, Social worker and Support worker.



What may happen?

GPs may make a referral to a specialist service. Your loved one will have an assessment to find the best options for them. They are likely to be treated as an outpatient. This means they will be treated in the community by statutory NHS services and/or third sector organisations (charities/community services).

In acute cases your loved one may be treated as an inpatient. This means they will be admitted to a specialist hospital for treatment.

[A Carer's Perspective video download](#)

[A Professional's Perspective video download](#)

Where can you find information and support as a carer?

- [BEAT](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/) [https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/supporting-someone/stages-of-change)
[Stages of change](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/supporting-someone/stages-of-change) <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/supporting-someone/stages-of-change>
- [PEDS](https://www.pedsupport.co.uk/) <https://www.pedsupport.co.uk/>
- [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust Carers](https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/patientsandcarers) (NHS)
<https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/patientsandcarers>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/eating-disorders/>
- [Feast](https://www.feast-ed.org/info-for-parents/) <https://www.feast-ed.org/info-for-parents/>
- [Rethink](https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups/rethink-carer-support-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough/) <https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups/rethink-carer-support-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough/>
- Maudsley approach <http://www.maudsleyparents.org/welcome.html>
- Janet Treasure <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/people/professor-janet-treasure>
- [Boys get anorexia too](http://www.boyanorexia.com/) - Jenny Langley
<http://www.boyanorexia.com/>
- [Eva Musby YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/evamusby) <https://www.youtube.com/evamusby>
- [CPSL Mind](https://www.cpslmind.org.uk) <https://www.cpslmind.org.uk>
- [Relate](http://www.relatecambridge.org.uk/) <http://www.relatecambridge.org.uk/>
- [Neda](https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/) <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>
- [Anorexia & Bulimia Care](https://www.anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk/) <https://www.anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk/>
- [Male Voice ED](https://www.malevoiced.com/) <https://www.malevoiced.com/>



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