

# I think my friend has an eating disorder

In our image-obsessed culture, we spend a lot of time thinking and talking about our body image. But you may have a friend who seems to have gone one step further, becoming obsessed about food and dieting. You are concerned that your friend might have an eating disorder and are not sure what to do.

## How do I know if my friend has an eating disorder?

Eating disorders affect the way people feel, behave and can have a terrible affect on their health. Here are some signs which may suggest that your friend has an eating disorder:

- Does your friend talk about food and weight all the time?
- Your friend exercises more than anyone else you know, even when they are feeling tired or unwell.
- Your friend avoids being around when everyone else is eating, such as at lunch time in the school or college cafeteria. She doesn't join in any more if you go for a meal at the weekend.
- Your friend starts to wear big or baggy clothes all the time
- When you eat with your friend, she cuts food into tiny pieces or moves food around on the plate instead of eating it.
- Is your friend proud of how little she eats?
- Does your friend go to the bathroom a lot, especially right after meals? Have you heard your friend vomiting after eating?
- Your friend always talks about how fat she is, even though she has lost a lot of weight and is one of the slimmest people you know.
- Is your friend very defensive or sensitive about her weight loss and eating habits?
- Does your friend take laxatives, steroids, or diet pills?
- Does your friend have a tendency to faint, bruises easily, is very pale, or starts complaining of being cold more than usual?

## How do I talk to my friend about eating disorders?

If your friend has some or many of the symptoms listed above and you are worried, it is a good idea to talk to them about your concerns.

It is a sensitive subject to discuss and your friend may feel ashamed, confused and be very secretive about her eating habits. She might be defensive or even angry when you bring up the subject.

The most important thing is to tell your friend that you care about them and want to help and support them. Try not to become frustrated if they don't listen to your advice. It is normal for people with eating disorders to take a long time to come to terms with the fact that they have a problem.

## How do I get help for my friend?

If your friend is willing to get help, offer to go with your friend to see a GP. A GP can assess your friend and refer him or her to counsellors and other health experts who can help. Your school nurse or college counsellor would also be a good start.

It is very important to have the support of experts because eating disorders are very serious and rarely get better on their own.

Your friend will be given the right treatment for their individual needs. This may involve seeing a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist to talk about their eating disorder and find a way to overcome it. People with eating disorders >

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## How do I get help for my friend? continued

sometimes need to go to hospital, but others can be treated while they continue to live at home.

There are also many good support groups where your friend can meet other people who have eating disorders and talk about their experiences. Friends are often welcome to attend groups and this can be a valuable way of continuing to support your friend.

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## I'm sure my friend has an eating disorder but they are in denial and won't get help. What should I do?

Eating disorders are serious illness which can have very serious effects on sufferers. If you are very concerned but your friend denies she has a problem, you should talk to an adult.

This may be difficult and feel like betraying a friend. But if your friend does have an eating disorder, she needs help from specialist health experts.

Perhaps you can talk to your own parents about your concerns, or your friend's parents. Your school or college counsellor is there to help with problems such as eating disorders and would be a good person to speak to.

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## My friend has an eating disorder. I'm not sure how to support or help her. What should I do?

Once your friend has been diagnosed with an eating disorder, health professionals will be responsible for helping your friend to overcome her illness.

But your friendship and support are very important and will play an important part in helping her to beat her eating disorder. Here are some things that you can do to help:

- Talk about your friend's strengths – the things that he or she enjoys and is good at.
- Try to avoid focusing on how your friend looks physically.
- Simple questions like "What can I do to help" and "What would make you feel better" can start positive conversations.
- Try not to talk about food, weight, diets, or body shape (yours, your friend's, or even a popular celebrity's).
- Try not to be too watchful of your friend's eating habits, food amounts, and choices.
- Try not to say things like, "If you'd just eat or stop going to the gym all the time you'll get better."

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## Where can I find out more?

Go to [www.newbridge-health.org.uk/information](http://www.newbridge-health.org.uk/information) for more information.