Eating disorders in one page

What it is

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is a serious mental illness that disturbs how you eat and how you feel about food and your body. The four main ones are anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder and other specified eating disorders. Around 1.1 million Australians were affected in 2023.

- An eating disorder is a mental illness, not a choice
- About 1.1 million Australians were affected in 2023
- Eating disorders happen at any age, weight or size

The signs

What are the signs of an eating disorder?

Signs of an eating disorder include strict dieting or skipping meals, binge eating, secret eating, compulsive exercise, and a constant focus on food, weight or body shape. Some people show only one sign, or none that others can see.

- Skipping meals and strict food rules can be signs
- Constant worry about food or body shape is a sign
- Some people show no signs that others can see

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get help for an eating disorder?

Start with your GP, who checks you, decides if you qualify for an Eating Disorder Plan, and refers you to a psychologist and a dietitian. In the ACT and Tasmania you can also refer yourself.

Treatment

Who treats an eating disorder?

Usually a team of three: a doctor, a mental health professional and a dietitian. Your GP normally writes and runs the plan. A psychiatrist or paediatrician can write it on referral, and must review it before you pass 20 sessions.

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Can my GP prescribe the medicine for binge eating disorder?

It depends on the medicine and the rules that apply to it, which we are still checking. Your GP is the right person to ask first. They can tell you whether they can prescribe it themselves, or whether a specialist needs to be involved. Ask about the cost, the wait and any referral before you start.

- Your GP is the place to start
- Ask if they can prescribe it themselves
- Ask if a specialist must be involved

What it costs

I have no Medicare: what is the process and the cost?

Without Medicare, you cannot get Medicare benefits through a treatment plan. You can still get help. Medicare Mental Health Centres take anyone in Australia, and Butterfly is another place to start. Overseas student health cover pays for psychology only with a GP referral or plan. Ask each service what it charges, and bring ID and any overseas records.

- Plan benefits need a Medicare card
- Medicare Mental Health Centres take anyone
- Student cover needs a GP referral or plan

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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