

# Eating Disorders: Getting Help Early

If you have concerns about your relationship with food or your body, it is vital to get advice, support and treatment straight away. Do not wait until your concerns have escalated into a full-blown eating disorder before seeking help. Skilled health professionals can give you tailored tools and strategies to prevent an eating disorder becoming entrenched and taking over your life.

Eating disorders are serious, potentially life-threatening, mental illnesses. Research shows that early intervention and treatment can increase the speed of your recovery.

**If you think you have an eating disorder, or have developed unhealthy behaviours or attitudes about body, weight or food, get help now.**

**If an eating disorder is already established, it can be hard to take the first step and seek treatment.** Being in two minds about change is completely normal – it is a symptom of the illness. A sense of ambivalence about getting treatment often occurs because an eating disorder can provide a sense of safety or control. Take one step at a time. There is no harm in talking to someone about your concerns.

**Who to turn to**  
**A family member or friend.** Sometimes it can be difficult to see the signs and symptoms of an eating disorder in yourself. Your friends or family may start to worry and want to talk to you about what is going on.

This can be confronting and it is natural to have a range of feelings – you might feel angry, worried, frustrated or scared. Try to choose one or two people to be honest with about what you are thinking and feeling. If you feel like you can't talk to someone you know, there are lots of options for discussing your concerns anonymously.



**Surround yourself with people you trust and people who will listen.** Eating disorders thrive on secrecy, so being open with loved ones can help take away some of the power that the eating disorder has over you. Having friends and family who know what is going on and who can talk to you about what you need, without being overly critical, is very important. They can help you on the journey ahead.

**“When I was sick I mostly spoke to my Mum and Dad, and relied on them for support. I also had a good therapist. My friends knew I was going through a tough time, but I didn't tell them much - they wouldn't have understood.”**

**- Subida, 23**

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**Someone in your social network.** There may be somebody in your community that you feel comfortable talking to, such as a teacher, youth group leader or family friend who is a supportive figure in your life. Take a moment to run through the trusted people you know and see if there is someone you feel you could speak to.

Some people may feel most comfortable talking to their family, but others may prefer to talk to a person outside their immediate circle of family and friends. Everybody's situation is unique and personal, so it is important you choose the avenue most suitable for you.

**The first step to finding the right treatment and support is to speak with a health professional and discuss what is happening for you.**

**Your GP.** It is important to go to your general practitioner (GP) if you have any concerns about your health, including thoughts and behaviours that could indicate an eating disorder.

Your GP will begin by asking a few questions to work out what is going on for you and will then make recommendations about the next steps. Your GP might refer you to a local mental health professional.

If you feel that your doctor does not understand what you are experiencing, seek out a health professional who does. Putting the right treatment team together takes time.

Having a good doctor who understands you and the seriousness of eating disorders is really important as they can help you access other health professionals that can help.

**A service provider (on the phone or on-line).** If you would prefer to talk to someone on the telephone or online, a confidential service may help give you some early information and advice.

**The Butterfly Foundation's National Helpline** is for anyone seeking information and support around eating disorders and body image issues.

1800 33 4673

[www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au](http://www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au)

**eheadspace** offers support and advice from trained counsellors to help anyone 12-25 years old work through anything that is bothering them.

[www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

**To find a health professional near you, search the nation-wide database on the InsideOut website.**  
[www.insideoutinstitute.org.au](http://www.insideoutinstitute.org.au)