



Going to the GP

Why is it important to see a GP?

If you are concerned that you or someone you care about is experiencing an eating disorder, it is important to make an appointment with a health professional as soon as possible. Early intervention is the most effective action for long-term recovery.

The first health professional you will likely see is a General Practitioner (GP). A GP will be able to provide an initial assessment and may provide you with a diagnosis regarding the type of eating disorder.

Although a dietitian, psychologist or psychiatrist can also provide a diagnosis, it is recommended you visit a GP as they can complete a physical health assessment and provide you with options and referrals for further treatment.

Choosing which GP to see

It's important to see your regular GP who knows you, or a GP that you are comfortable with. If you don't have a regular GP, look for a GP that has 'eating disorders' or at the very least, 'mental health', as one of their treating specialties. No matter which GP you see, it's important that you are prepared for your appointment. It is advisable to book a **double appointment** for your first consultation to ensure there is adequate time to cover the assessment and referral process.

Preparing for your appointment

We encourage you to follow the below steps which will help you feel empowered about your own or your child's healthcare.

For children under the age of 18:

Parent or caregiver to complete the checklist on the Feed Your Instinct website (www.feedyourinstinct.com.au) and print the report to take with you. Feed Your Instinct (FYI) is an interactive tool designed to support parents of children and young people experiencing different types of eating and/or body image problems. The checklist outlines changes you may have noticed in your child. The report will provide instructions to your GP on the appropriate next steps for your child.

For anyone over the age of 18:

Complete the checklist on the Reach Out and Recover website (www.reachoutandrecover.com.au) and print the report to take with you. The report will help you to share what has been happening for you in regard to your eating and body concerns and is particularly helpful if you find it difficult to talk about your concerns. The reports will be more accurate and give you best value for your help seeking journey if you answer all of the questions. But if you feel uncomfortable, you can leave some questions and perhaps come back to them later.

What to expect from your GP consultation

Going to the doctor for concerns around an eating disorder can feel like a big step. Understanding what is likely to happen at your appointment can help ease your anxiety.

Talking to your doctor

It's important to speak as openly and honestly about your symptoms and concerns as possible. The pre-filled out checklists will also give your doctor a good indication of what's going on. Your doctor may ask you a range of questions to help inform their assessment. You may feel more comfortable bringing a loved one or friend with you to help support you or explain things.

Physical check-up

The doctor will need to do a physical check-up to assess the stability of your medical health. This may also involve taking some blood for testing. If you are weighed, it's important to know that you do not have to see the number on the scales – you can ask to face the other way or not be told the number.

It's also important to note that the GP should not focus exclusively on physical measures to determine if you are experiencing an eating disorder. Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses that can have large variations in physical presentations.

Diagnosis and referrals

The GP may be able to make a diagnosis for you during the appointment. If they are unable to make a diagnosis on the spot, they may refer you to a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist, for a more detailed assessment. If your condition requires urgent medical action, you may be referred to a hospital or inpatient treatment facility.

As part of the process for making a diagnosis the GP (or other health professional) is likely to ask you to complete (or guide you through completing) the **Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q)**.

The EDE-Q is a global assessment tool that is used for eating disorders. You don't need to worry about interpreting the results of your EDE-Q, that's up to your doctor. A completed EDE-Q is required as part of the assessment process for an **Eating Disorder Plan** (see below) covered under Medicare. It is recommended that you complete the EDE-Q with the support of your doctor but if you would like to view the questionnaire before your appointment you can find a copy on the Inside Out website (www.insideoutinstitute.com.au).

If the GP has made a diagnosis, they will then discuss the treatment options available to you. This should include a referral to the most suitable services based on your psychological and/or physical condition. If you are eligible, these referrals may be made under an Eating Disorder Plan (EDP) which allows for 20 subsidized sessions with a dietitian and up to 40 subsidized sessions with a mental health clinician.

For more information see our factsheets 'Treatment options in Victoria' and 'Medicare for eating disorders'.

Even though you will likely be referred to other services for ongoing treatment, your relationship with your GP shouldn't end there. Often, a GP will remain an integral part of your treatment team, which is why it is so important you find a GP that works for you. There are many different treatment pathways, and you may need several attempts to find the one that works for you.

What happens if my GP isn't confident in referring me for further treatment?

Not all GPs are skilled in managing the treatment of eating disorders. If this is the case with your doctor, you can advise them that EDV recommends they read this information outlined by the National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC) (www.nedc.com.au/professional-development/medicare-items/).

If your GP is looking for further guidance, we encourage them to get in touch with our Telehealth Nurse at EDV. The nurse can provide guidance and information over the phone regarding potential referral pathways.

Getting a second opinion

Unfortunately, not everyone has a good experience when seeking help for an eating disorder. If your doctor does not diagnose an eating disorder but you are still concerned about warning signs and symptoms, it's a good idea to get a second opinion. This may be another GP, or a mental health professional such as a psychologist.



Contact EDV

For additional support, please contact the EDV Hub on 1300 550 236 between 9.30am – 4.30pm, Monday – Friday or email edv@eatingdisorders.org.au.

Our trained volunteers can help you find appropriate practitioners in your local area.