

SPACE TO BREATHE

Eating Disorders and Heart Health

Why physical monitoring matters at every body size

Eating disorders can affect circulation, heart rate, blood pressure, heart rhythm and the balance of fluids and electrolytes. Risk varies between people and cannot be assessed from appearance alone. Regular medical monitoring is an essential part of treatment when physical health may be affected.

UNDERSTAND**NOTICE****SUPPORT**

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- How the heart may be affected
- What monitoring may involve
- Seek urgent help for

Use this guide to understand, begin a conversation, or help someone feel less alone.

You do not need to read it all at once. Pause whenever you need to and return when you feel ready.

A compassionate information guide

This resource offers general information and does not replace individual medical or specialist eating-disorder care.

Understanding what may be happening

How the heart may be affected

- Inadequate nutrition can reduce heart muscle strength and slow heart rate.
- Dehydration, vomiting or medicine misuse can disturb electrolytes and rhythm.
- Blood pressure may fall, particularly on standing, causing dizziness or fainting.
- Driven exercise can add strain when the body is under-fuelled or medically unstable.

What monitoring may involve

- Pulse, lying and standing blood pressure, temperature and hydration.
- Blood tests selected for the person's behaviours and symptoms.
- An ECG to examine heart rhythm when clinically indicated.
- Repeated assessment because one reassuring result is only one moment in time.

Seek urgent help for

- Chest pain, fainting, severe breathlessness or a racing/irregular heartbeat.
- Confusion, collapse, seizures or extreme weakness.
- Serious dehydration, uncontrolled vomiting or rapid deterioration.

Gentle, practical ways forward

Support should always be adapted to the person, their diagnosis, physical health, culture, neurotype and treatment plan.

WHAT MAY HELP

- Be honest about restriction, vomiting, laxatives, diuretics and exercise.
- Follow activity guidance from the clinical team.
- Do not use a smartwatch result to rule out medical risk.
- Attend monitoring even if you feel embarrassed or “look well”.
- Call 999 or attend A&E; for emergency symptoms.

A gentle reminder

Medical monitoring is not punishment or proof that someone has failed. It is a way of protecting recovery and catching risk early.

Please seek urgent help for fainting, chest pain, confusion, severe weakness, uncontrolled vomiting, blood, serious dehydration, or immediate risk of harm. In the UK call 999/A&E; for an emergency, NHS 111 for urgent advice, or contact your GP/eating-disorder team.

Trusted information

NHS: Eating disorders overview

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/eating-disorders/overview/>

NICE: Eating disorders: recognition and treatment (NG69)

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng69>

Royal College of Psychiatrists: Medical Emergencies in Eating Disorders (MEED)

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/campaigning-for-better-mental-health-policy/college-reports/2022-college-reports/cr233>

Beat: Eating-disorder information and support

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

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