

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY • SUPPORT HUB

Brain Fog and Eating Disorders

Why concentration, memory and decisions can become harder

People often blame themselves when they cannot focus, remember words, organise tasks or make simple decisions. Eating disorders can place the brain and nervous system under significant strain. Brain fog is not laziness or lack of intelligence; it can be a sign that the mind and body need more consistent support.

UNDERSTAND**NOTICE****SUPPORT**

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- What people may notice
- What may contribute
- Why it matters

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

What people may notice

- Reading the same sentence repeatedly.
- Losing words, forgetting appointments or struggling to follow conversation.
- Becoming stuck over food choices or everyday decisions.
- Feeling mentally slowed, detached, irritable or unusually rigid.
- Work, study and driving feeling harder or less safe.

What may contribute

- Inadequate or irregular nutrition can reduce available energy for thinking.
- Dehydration, electrolyte disturbance, poor sleep and anxiety may worsen concentration.
- Constant food and body thoughts take up mental attention.
- Depression, trauma, ADHD, autism, medication or another medical problem may also contribute.

Why it matters

- Cognitive symptoms can make treatment instructions difficult to remember.
- Reduced flexibility can make eating-disorder rules feel more convincing.
- A person may need written information, repetition, practical help and reduced demands.

Gentle, practical ways forward

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

WHAT MAY HELP

- Tell a clinician about new, worsening or unsafe cognitive changes.
- Use short written plans, reminders and one decision at a time.
- Ask a trusted person to attend appointments and take notes.
- Avoid driving or risky tasks if dizzy, faint, confused or unable to concentrate.
- Treat nourishment, hydration and rest as part of cognitive support, following professional advice.

A gentle reminder

Clearer thinking can return gradually. Needing support while the brain recovers is a reasonable adjustment, not a personal failure.

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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