

SPACE TO BREATHE THERAPY • SUPPORT HUB

Eating Disorders Can Affect Any Body

Why size never decides who deserves help

One of the most harmful myths is that an eating disorder has a particular look. People in larger, smaller and average-sized bodies can experience severe restriction, bingeing, purging, compulsive movement and intense distress. Medical risk cannot be judged by appearance.

UNDERSTAND**NOTICE****SUPPORT**

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- Why the myth causes harm
- A fuller assessment considers
- Language that helps

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

Why the myth causes harm

- People may delay asking for help because they do not feel “ill enough”.
- Friends and professionals may miss symptoms or praise harmful weight change.
- Weight stigma can encourage restriction and make healthcare feel unsafe.
- Rapid change, behaviours and physical symptoms can be serious regardless of starting size.

A fuller assessment considers

- Eating patterns, restriction, bingeing, purging and compensatory behaviours.
- Rate of change and growth history where relevant.
- Heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, hydration, blood tests and symptoms.
- Mental distress, suicide risk, daily functioning and coexisting conditions.
- The person’s story, not a single number.

Language that helps

- Avoid compliments about weight loss or assumptions about health from size.
- Use neutral, respectful language chosen with the person.
- Challenge the idea that treatment or nourishment must be earned.

Gentle, practical ways forward

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

WHAT MAY HELP

- Describe behaviours and symptoms clearly when seeking care.
- Ask how risk was assessed if concerns are dismissed because of appearance.
- Bring a trusted advocate to appointments.
- Seek a second clinical opinion if serious symptoms are not addressed.
- Use specialist guidance and emergency services when urgent signs are present.

A gentle reminder

No one has to become thinner, sicker or more visible before they are worthy of assessment, treatment and compassion.

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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