

Recognising My Warning Signs

Noticing changes early can help you seek support before things become more difficult. This workbook helps you identify your own emotional, behavioural, physical and food-related warning signs and decide what support you want to put in place.

Why early signs matter

An eating disorder can become louder gradually. Changes may begin with thoughts becoming more rigid, increased anxiety around meals, withdrawing from people, changes in routines or feeling more preoccupied with food, body image or control. Sometimes other people notice a change before you do.

Warning signs are not evidence that you have failed. They are information. Recognising them gives you an opportunity to respond with support rather than waiting until you are overwhelmed.

Changes in my thoughts when I am struggling

What becomes more repetitive, critical, fearful, rule-based or difficult to challenge?

Changes in my mood

Anxiety, irritability, sadness, numbness, overwhelm, shame or needing more reassurance.

Changes in my routines or social life

Isolation, cancelling plans, increased rigidity, avoiding eating with others or losing interest in things.

Changes I Notice Around Eating

Food-related warning signs can look very different depending on the person and the eating disorder. Focus on changes from your own steadier pattern rather than comparing yourself with somebody else.

Changes around food or mealtimes

Avoiding, delaying, increasing rules or rituals, distress, secrecy, loss of flexibility or changes in variety.

Changes before meals

What thoughts, feelings, urges or behaviours begin to appear?

Changes during meals

What happens to anxiety, concentration, pace, rituals, sensory tolerance or communication?

Changes after meals

Checking, guilt, distress, compensatory urges, withdrawal or needing reassurance.

Physical signs that tell me I need support

Weakness, dizziness, feeling cold, faintness, fatigue, pain, digestive changes or anything unusual for me.

Sensory signs I notice

Changes in tolerance of smell, texture, sound, temperature, presentation or the eating environment.

Seeing the Wider Picture

When you are close to a pattern, it can be difficult to see that it is changing. A trusted person may notice differences in your energy, mood, routines or ability to participate in everyday life. Agreeing in advance what they can mention - and how - can make these conversations feel safer.

What might other people notice before I do?

Mood, tiredness, isolation, food rules, avoidance, checking, movement, concentration or changes in routine.

How would I like someone to raise a concern with me?

Think about timing, tone, privacy and words that help you feel respected.

What approaches make it harder for me to listen?

Pressure, criticism, arguments, comments about appearance, comparison or another approach.

Who has permission to tell me they are worried?

List the people whose observations you are willing to hear.

What would help me respond rather than shut down?

Time, written communication, choices, reassurance, space or professional support.

What do I want them to remember about me?

You are a whole person, not a collection of symptoms.

My Early-Support Plan

Deciding what you will do before a difficult period can reduce the number of decisions you need to make when your capacity is lower. Your plan can include both personal and professional support.

What would tell me it is time to contact a professional?

Identify changes that should not be managed alone.

My early-support step will be...

Keep the first action clear and achievable.

The person or service I will contact first

Record who, how and what you may need to tell them.

If I cannot explain what is happening verbally

Could I show this workbook, send a message, use notes or ask someone to speak with me?

What support can make meals safer while I seek help?

Consider company, planning, environment and professional advice.

What should the people around me take seriously?

Record the signs that mean you need prompt additional support.

Keeping My Warning-Sign Plan Useful

Your warning signs may change as recovery develops. Revisit this plan after difficult periods and during steadier ones. The aim is to learn what your mind and body communicate before things become more difficult.

A warning sign I understand better now

Something that helped me respond earlier

Something I want my support network to remember

One thing I will do if I notice these signs again

Books & useful support

8 Keys to Recovery from an Eating Disorder - Carolyn Costin & Gwen Schubert Grabb

Skills-based Caring for a Loved One with an Eating Disorder - Janet Treasure, Anna Smith & Anna Crane

Sick Enough - Jennifer L. Gaudiani

Beat and the **NHS** provide UK eating-disorder information and routes to assessment and treatment.

A message from me

You do not have to wait until things feel unmanageable before you deserve support. Learning your warning signs is not about watching yourself more closely or judging every difficult thought. It is about recognising when you need more care, understanding and support. If something feels as though it is changing, let that be enough reason to reach out.

Space to Breathe Therapy
Support • Understand • Empower