

Overview - Eating Disorder

An eating disorder is a serious complex mental illness which involves an unhealthy relationship with food - people starve themselves or over exercise (anorexia nervosa); purge themselves (bulimia); binge-eat (binge eating disorder BED); or have a range of symptoms that don't match those above (other specified feeding or eating disorder or OSFED). Anorexia is the least common: OSFED the most common.

Eating disorders are not a lifestyle choice but caused by a mix of genetic, biological, behavioural, psychological, and social factors. Individuals are affected physically, mentally and socially.

Students with an eating disorder may experience the following:

- Discomfort eating in public or with others.
- A need to go to the bathroom often.
- Changes to weight – noticeable loss or gain, or fluctuating weight.
- Physical weakness from poor diet.
- Difficulty concentrating, tiredness and irritability.
- Low confidence and self-esteem.
- Anxiety.
- Perfectionism in course work.
- Self-harm.
- Increased risk on transition to university – having to manage an eating disorder in a new environment alongside increased pressures for academic achievement.
- Difficult relationships with housemates anxious about or irritated by the student's behaviour, or social isolation.



Top tips for teaching students with an eating disorder:

- Be seen to be consistently supportive: acknowledge the student and her/his work.
- Offer advice to keep a student from getting stressed about academic tasks: support her/him to pace academic tasks and to have reasonable expectations of achievement.
- Respond quickly to requests for advice on academic tasks and be ready to provide one-to-one tutorials.
- Provide summaries in writing or support the student to record notes of seminars and tutorials to counter concentration problems.
- Make adjustments to physically demanding tasks to accommodate any physical weakness.
- Be open to the student talking about her/his health experiences and listen actively.
- Be respectful and don't make assumptions - ask the student what would be helpful.
- Encourage the student to access professional help if she/he becomes unwell.
- If you have concerns about a student, contact Student Services (studentservices@fxplus.ac.uk).

Useful links

- <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/>
- <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>
- <http://www.studentminds.org.uk/supportforafriend-eatingdisorders.html>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/eating-disorders>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/eating-problems/for-friends-family/>

