

WHAT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders can affect individuals of all ages, but they often manifest in early childhood, continuing into adulthood.

There are a number of reasons why individuals may develop a complicated relationship with food, including traumatic life events, such as divorce or death of a loved one, change of schools or bullying, sexual assault, difficult family relationships, illness, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. Very often, it's a result of a parent's own negative approach to food. If you frequently comment on your weight or that of your children, they could develop a preoccupation with their appearance that eventually manifests in an eating disorder.

Research suggests that the prevalence of eating disorders increased exponentially during the pandemic, affecting the way children see themselves at increasingly younger ages – some as young as 8. According to Emily Pluhar, a paediatric psychologist at Boston Children's Hospital in the US, controlling their own behaviour was one way in which they tried to cope with the situation.

Social media is also believed to be a major contributor to poor body image in young people, despite steps taken by the platforms to block hashtags such as #anorexia, #thinspo and certain accounts that promote disordered eating. If these are searched, details for organisations that assist individuals affected by eating disorders are now offered instead.

However, teen communities are still bypassing these efforts by disguising their discussions and content behind creative hashtags and specific abbreviations. In doing this, they remain able to spread and share content that features low-kilojoule diets, as well as dangerous tips on how to lose weight and fast for longer.

It's clear that we need to assist our children in building a healthy, balanced relationship with food, for life.



How to set the right foundation

- Have regular, open conversations with your children about food. If they understand that food is fuel, and how different food groups help to build the body and strengthen their immunity, they'll acquire a different perspective on the role of food in their life.
- Model good behaviour. Serve healthy meals in your home and try to get your children involved in the cooking process. Not only will this help to improve the way they look at food, but it will also prepare them for adulthood, when they make their own choices.
- Check the way you speak about your body and other people's bodies. Always avoid negative comments, and try to avoid speaking about someone who has picked up or lost weight. These comments feed directly into how children will view themselves as they grow older.
- The changes children go through during puberty can be overwhelming. Check in with them regularly, and engage in honest conversations.
- Teach your children what their body is capable of. Research shows that when children are active (climbing, running, riding a bike or playing sports), they are less likely to worry about what their body looks like.
- Look into the kind of media your children are exposed to. Try to avoid movies, music or content from social media that fixate on appearance.

The bottom line

If a member of your family has an unhealthy relationship with food, it's likely to have an impact on the whole family.

If you're picking up signs of a preoccupation with appearance or weight, don't hesitate to speak to a therapist.



If you or your loved one needs support during this time, reach out to your ICAS EHWP via your toll-free number or the ICAS On-the-Go App to seek counselling support.

Toll-free:
(from land and mobile phones)

Or request a call back: ***134*905#**

Company App Code:

Applicable to you and those who live under your roof

References:

<https://healthtalk.org/eating-disorders/early-experiences-with-food-and-eating>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/22/technology/social-media-eating-disorders.html?searchResultPosition=4>

<https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/risk-groups>