



Understanding... Eating Distress

'Eating distress' is a term used to describe a number of conditions, the most common of which are anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Compulsive over-eating can also be classed as a form of eating distress. In many cases, problems with eating arise out of dissatisfaction with personal body image, but they can also be the result of individuals feeling the need to take control of what they perceive to be an otherwise uncontrollable life.

What is Eating Distress?

Although the majority of people who suffer from eating distress are women, one in ten sufferers are men and this proportion is increasing. People who experience eating distress are frequently high achievers and are often students who have a simultaneously low self-esteem and a lack of self-worth. In addition, it is worth remembering that some people are more genetically susceptible than others to eating distress.

Pressures to conform to the idealised image of manhood and womanhood, as portrayed in the media, high levels of anxiety, which can be made worse by the increased financial hardship faced by many students, and sometimes, the fear of facing the responsibilities of adult life for the first time can all play a part in the onset of eating distress.

People with anorexia may try to control their food intake to an extreme extent by eating only low calorie foods and sometimes even starving themselves. They may also exercise excessively. People with bulimia are often caught in a cycle of bingeing and purging, where the individual eats to excess and then makes him/herself sick. To outsiders, the sufferer may appear to be one of those lucky individuals who eats and drinks what they want without ever putting on weight. Early intervention is vital as anorexia can potentially be a life-threatening disease. Both anorexia and bulimia can have long-term effects on a sufferer's health, leading to problems such as osteoporosis, infertility, liver and kidney problems as well as heart disease. It should not be forgotten that compulsive over-eating is also a form of eating distress and can be equally traumatic for both the individual concerned and those around him/her.

Continued overleaf

Helping Yourself

The first step is to recognise that you or someone you know has an eating problem.

Someone with an eating problem may:

- Starve themselves or compulsively over-eat
- Make themselves sick
- Use laxatives or diuretics
- Exercise excessively
- Have extreme weight loss or gain
- Suffer from attacks of dizziness and fainting
- Have poor concentration and a short attention span

Once you have accepted that you have a problem, you should understand that you do not need to face your problem alone. There are many experienced and qualified individuals and groups in your area who can help you and your next step is to make contact with one or more of them.

Helping Others

It is frequently difficult for a person to accept that they have an eating problem. Often they regard the control they have over their weight as the only thing they can manage in an otherwise demanding and chaotic life. Sometimes the eating disorder is symptomatic of a more complex psychological problem. You can help by encouraging your friend to seek professional advice or support. Simply listening can be of enormous benefit, as can the promise of future appointments or meetings to discuss the sufferer's worries. However, it is important that you remember your own professional and personal limitations and that you encourage anybody with an eating problem to seek expert advice as soon as possible.



GETTING SUPPORT

In the University:

You can talk confidentially to the Dean of Student Affairs or other members of the Student Support Team.

Email: student.support@ncl.edu.my

Webform: studentsupport.newcastle.edu.my

Or make an appointment at the Student Office.

Outside the University:

Your GP or family doctor can be a useful first point of contact. In some cases, your doctor will refer you for more specialised help and support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone over the phone.

The Befrienders Johor Bahru

The Befrienders offers confidential emotional support through a helpline and email service.

Helpline (1pm to 12am): 07 33 123 00

Email: sam@befriendersjb.org

Website: <http://www.befriendersjb.org/>

Hospital Permai

Trunk Line/Operator: 07 231 1000

Emergency (BDM): 07 231 1170

URGENT HELP OR SUPPORT

Emergency Services

If you are worried about your safety or feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are worried about the safety of a fellow student, you need to access help immediately.

If you feel your life is in imminent danger, you should call 999 or go to Accident and Emergency at the nearest hospital.

For emergencies on campus, call NUMed Security.

NUMed Security (24/7): 07 555 3881/3984/3985

Out-of-Hours Help

Out-of-hours on weekdays and on week-ends, you may call the NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day emergency number.

NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day: 011 1231 1276

