

Eating Disorders

A Young Healthwatch investigation into support
available in Swindon.

This Report was written by Abigail Williams who is studying Health and Social Care at New College and is on placement with Healthwatch Swindon based on research and her personal experience.

What are eating Disorders?

An eating disorder is something to do with mental health, it links to your mental health as it is the way you see food and how your mind set is towards it. There are different types of eating disorders for example bulimia and anorexia which are mirrored in a way. There is a binge eating disorder and other specified disorders. An eating disorder is a diagnosed medical condition that is based on your eating patterns, this involves having medical examinations on your weight, blood and body mass index. Having an eating disorder means you either have a difficult or unhealthy relationship with food.

When you are diagnosed with an eating disorder it is about how you see and view food. Some people could look at an orange and chocolate bar and think if I eat that chocolate bar, I will gain two pounds and if you eat the orange, I will lose two pounds it's all about mind set. See someone else may think I will have the orange now and then the chocolate bar later as a treat. It's about viewing food in healthy ways.



“I struggled with an eating disorder a few years ago when my nan passed away. It was a very tough time for me, and food just seemed to be a main priority.”



If you went to the doctor to get a diagnosis but the doctor couldn't work out what type of eating disorder, you had they wouldn't categorise. If you understand your thoughts and feelings towards food, it can be very helpful and help solve the problem easier and that way you will be able to find ways to manage it.

An eating disorder can affect anyone there isn't any specific individuals it can affect. It is more of a mindset and if you view food good and bad or think negatively about it then an eating disorder is something you can develop and become diagnosed with.

There are other forms of eating disorders like anorexia nervosa which is when you try and control your weight by not eating enough food and exercising too much. Bulimia is losing control over how much you eat and then taken extreme measures so that you don't put on weight. The binge eating disorder is when you eat large portions of food and keep going until you feel more than full, you eat until you feel like being sick.

Eating disorders can be linked to mental health or experience in life like loss of a loved one you were really close to. For example, someone with depression could not eat as they feel too low to have an appetite which can lead to anorexia. An individual with anxiety may eat more to try and calm their nerves and it can be used as a coping technique and this then links to bulimia.

An eating disorder can also come from something that has happened in your life and if your mind isn't right then your body won't be right the mind and body are connected and it's amazing how it works. If you stress or worry over something too much, then you can stop yourself from eating. An example is if you have exams coming in and they are extremely important with the amount of studying you are doing you can stress yourself out so much that you stop eating or stop your time of the month. Your time of the month is also linked to eating, when we are on our time of the month, we have cravings for certain food like chocolate for example but depending on how strong our cravings are is how much of it you eat.

What support is available?

When it comes to help and support around these issues there isn't a huge amount of help. Enough though there are a lot of individuals out there that struggle with eating disorders which also links to mental health because the brain is an amazing thing. The way we view things especially when it comes to food. There is the NHS of course but the location is a problem a lot of the time, where people live is it close enough to access or is it a two-bus journey just to get the help and support. There should be multiple places in different communities that are more accessible to individuals.

There is help out there, but it is mainly online and some individuals may feel more comfortable talking about their feelings in person because you can tell how someone feels by their body language and it could help them to open up more.

In Swindon there are charities but there aren't a lot of community groups where people can go and chat to others going through the same things and share advice and strategies of how they cope, and it can improve someone else's life and make things more easier for them.

Better help, - this is a therapy that is affordable but like the others it is online and not everyone wants to discuss how they feel online



In my personal opinion when I went through a rough time with food I spoke to a nurse but it was on the phone as I have left school, but in person made me



feel more comfortable when it was in person and I could talk to them about how I felt and my body language gave off messages that I was comfortable and it enabled me to open up.

Mainly in Swindon it is mainly online support which is easy to access but community groups and pop open session don't really exist where as in places like Bath and North East Somerset they do.

Beat, this is a national eating disorder society. They have help lines that are open 365 days a year, chatrooms where you can share your situations with others going through the same thing, resources like free downloads from self-help forms to GP forms. There isn't any in person face to face but there is lots of support on their website to look at which is very useful.

Overall, there are many places where you can get help and support from for eating disorders but not a huge amount in person. Swindon needs somewhere that is local, if someone has a serious eating disorder than is becoming less and less manageable then they are going to be struggling a lot. More help and support is needed in Swindon.

Support Available:

- NHS- [Overview - Eating disorders - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)
- BEAT- [The UK's Eating Disorder Charity - Beat \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](https://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)
- Talk-ed [Supporting someone with an eating disorder - TalkED \(talk-ed.org.uk\)](https://talk-ed.org.uk)
- Family Lives - [Bulimia, anorexia help and advice | Family Lives](https://www.familylives.org.uk)
- Young Minds - [Eating Disorders & Problems | Guide For Parents | YoungMinds](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)



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