



Oxford Health
NHS Foundation Trust



Cotswold House Specialist Eating Disorders

**Are you caring for a loved
one with an eating
disorder?**

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What is the definition of a carer?

Are you living with or involved with someone who is experiencing an eating disorder?

If you are, you are an informal carer for your loved one.

You may not have identified yourself as a carer so this may all be new to you.

An informal carer can be anyone whether you are a parent, partner, friend, family member or work colleague. We hope this leaflet gives you helpful information.

What is an eating disorder?

A serious mental illness that can take different forms and varying lengths of time to recover from.

The vast majority of people recover, and it is the most likely outcome, although it can still take a long time.

Eating disorders can affect anyone at any time, regardless of race, age, or their gender identity. Eating disorders and recovery will look different for everyone.

Early help is really important to recovery. Often eating disorders are hidden or kept a secret.

However, there are important signs and symptoms that parent/carers can look out for.

NHS England's website lists the following:

- Dramatic weight loss
- Lying about how much they've eaten, when they've eaten, or their weight
- Eating a lot of food very fast going to the bathroom a lot after eating, exercising a lot
- Avoiding eating with others, cutting food into small pieces or eating very slowly
- Wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss

Other symptoms/signs may be:

- Avoiding socialising when food may be involved
- Unnatural focus on what others are eating
- Needing to know calorie content of all foods
- New interest in cooking and recipes but avoiding eating the food
- Repetitive requests for reassurance about appearance.

Eating disorders are about controlling emotions and feelings and are complex.

Supporting someone with an eating disorder can be worrying and you may be feeling overwhelmed. This can be a long illness, so it is really important to look after yourself.

What are the key messages?

- 1** Eating disorders are about feelings not food.
- 2** Parents/carers are not to blame. Many factors contribute to eating disorders like genetics, brain structure, cultural elements, reactions to trauma and biology etc.
- 3** It is important to look after yourself.
- 4** If you get offered help, take it. You do not have to go through this alone.
- 5** Your loved one may have to do it on their own sometimes, know when to step back.
- 6** Stay positive and never give up hope, recovery is the most likely outcome.
- 7** Your loved one is still your loved one, they are still in there.
- 8** They must know that your love for them is unconditional.
- 9** It's ok to make mistakes – learn and be open.

- 10** Aim for good enough caring, not perfect caring. Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself.

What can you do as Carers?

- ✔ Parents/carers are part of the solution. There is a lot that you can do to help. Recovery significantly increases with knowledgeable carers and a calm and warm environment.
- ✔ Maintain normality as much as possible so that you are a good example. Keep doing your hobbies and the things you enjoy.
- ✔ You always have a voice. You can see the GP yourself to convey your concerns about your loved one.
- ✔ Focus on the here and now.
- ✔ Show empathy and validate – for example tell your loved one that you can see how hard things are, acknowledge and encourage their efforts and try not to criticise or give advice.
- ✔ Keep lines of communication open – don't make it all about the eating disorder.
- ✔ It can help you all to set clear and consistent boundaries.
- ✔ Be open to connecting with people who have similar experiences. Support groups can be invaluable. Share the burden with others.

- ✔ Listening is really important. It may not seem like much, it shows that you care and in doing this it can help your loved one understand their feelings.

What can you do as Carers?

It's important to support your loved one to seek help as early as possible.

- Encourage your loved one to see their GP or to contact a voluntary organisation
- Encourage your loved one to seek online support from appropriate resources
- Try not to be put off by professionals if they do not understand, or if your experience isn't as positive as you had hoped.
- If you have a negative experience be prepared to ask to see a mental health professional, a different GP or a different therapist/professional

What May Happen?

GPs may make a referral to a specialist service. Your loved one will have an assessment to find the best options for them.

They are likely to be treated as an outpatient, this means they will be treated in the community by statutory NHS services and/or third sector organisations (charities/community services).

In acute cases your loved one may be treated as an inpatient, this means they will be admitted to a specialist hospital for treatment.

Looking after yourself

Supporting and caring for a loved one who is suffering from an eating disorder is not an easy task and can have a huge impact on family, friends, and carers.

We believe it is important that carers are supported in this difficult and sometimes over-whelming task.

Friends and Family Meeting

This meeting is held monthly on a Saturday morning between 10 -11.30am.

The meeting is available for any families and carers of current inpatient, day-patient and outpatients and carers of those currently on our waiting list.

Clinicians from the WCEDS team facilitate the meeting.

The aim is to provide a safe environment to talk about the impact the eating disorder has had on you and your family.

It is also an opportunity to meet other carers, share ideas and resources and look after your own well-being.

Some sessions will cover a specific topic such as cycle of change. Questions can be submitted in advance of the meeting and questions for presentations can be made.

The group aims to:

- Provide specialist support and advice about caring for someone with an eating disorder
- Provide useful information and resources about eating disorders
- Provide a supportive space for sharing experiences

Carer's Liaison

Carers are always welcome to raise concerns with us if they feel that their loved one is deteriorating, and they have serious concerns about their physical or mental health and/or if a patient has disengaged and is no longer in treatment.

In this case we may advise you to contact their GP for new referral.

Information and Support

BEAT: <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

EVA MUSBY YOUTUBE: <https://www.youtube.com/EVAMUSBY>

NEDA: <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

ANOREXIA & BULIMIA CARE <https://yippy.health/profile/talk-ed>

Accessibility

Patient information leaflets are available on our website:
www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/leaflets

Get in touch

Address Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
 Trust Headquarters
 Littlemore Mental Health Centre
 Sandford Road, Oxford OX4 4XN

Phone 01865 901 000
Email enquiries@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk
Website www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Feedback

Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provides advice and support to patients, families, and carers, helping to resolve any problems, concerns, or complaints you may have.

Phone 0800 328 7971
Email PALS@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Become a member of our foundation trust: www.ohftnhs.uk/membership

Support Oxford Health Charity, making a difference to patients, their families and staff who care for them: **www.oxfordhealth.charity**