Obesity Services

Referral to an Eating Disorders Service

Eating disorders and obesity

Over 1.6 million people in the UK are thought to have an eating disorder\(^1\). Eating disorders include anorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorder with bulimia and binge eating disorder being much more common than anorexia. Eating disorders can affect people of any age, gender, weight or background. Amongst people with obesity, binge eating is thought to be relatively common and some studies have shown that up to 46% of people with obesity report binge eating\(^2\).

It is not uncommon for us to see people in the Obesity Service who may also be experiencing an eating disorder. This could be something that has started fairly recently or been going on for quite some time. It is quite likely that the eating disorder is complicating their weight management and making it very difficult for them to lose weight safely.

Experience and studies have shown that it is important to address any eating disorder first before starting weight management treatment. This is because an undiagnosed and untreated eating disorder is likely to interfere with successful and safe weight loss and cause continued distress for the patient.

Referral to an eating disorders service

If we think someone might be experiencing an eating disorder then we recommend that their GP refers them to a specialist eating disorders service where they can be properly assessed and if necessary, an appropriate treatment plan developed. In some instances, we are able to refer the patient directly.

Specialist services exist with the expertise to assess and treat people with eating disorders. Typically, a referral will result in being invited for an assessment where you will complete questionnaires and talk about your eating habits, thoughts about food, weight and shape and your general mood and feelings. From this assessment, the health professionals will want to agree the next steps with you. This may involve further assessment, a review of medication, participating in individual or group therapy or making use of self-help materials.

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The health professionals that typically work in eating disorder services include psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, dietitians and nurses. These professionals all understand how difficult it can be to live with an eating disorder and how people can feel nervous and embarrassed when talking about their eating habits, thoughts and feelings. They are also aware that all sorts of eating disorders exist and can affect people of any age, weight, background or gender. These professionals know better than most how important it is to have a non-judgemental and understanding attitude.

**What are the benefits of being referred to an eating disorders service?**

If it is recommended that you are referred to an eating disorders service this means that you can access specialists with expertise in assessing and treating eating disorders. This means that you will hear their expert opinion on whether they think you have an eating disorder or not and what treatment might be best for you. Although it may feel like this could delay any weight loss treatments, in the long run it will be well worth establishing if an eating disorder is complicating your weight management.

The last thing you need is an undiagnosed eating disorder getting in the way of successful and safe weight loss. The best way to progress and achieve your weight loss goals would be to get the help you need to assess and tackle any eating disorder and thereby increase the chances of successful weight loss which can be maintained in the long term.

**For more information about eating disorders:**

**NHS Choices** website has lots of information about eating disorders:  
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Eatingdisorders

**BEAT** – a national eating disorders charity provides lots of information about eating disorders as well as support for people with them via their website:  
www.b-eat.co.uk
We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

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