

Eating disorders

Initial assessment in primary care



Eating disorders can affect men and women

May present alone or with parent/guardian

Parent/guardian may present alone with concerns



Ask about: Changes in eating Food eaten yesterday

Vomiting Exercise

Repeated weighing or body checking

Preoccupation with weight and shape

Are they trying to lose weight?

If so, what would be their ideal weight?

Use of diet pills and laxatives

Stopping prescribed medicines

Suppressing hunger with caffeine, smoking, or excessive water drinking

Developing a therapeutic relationship is important:

> Thank you for being brave enough to tell me about this

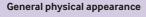
Be honest about the limits of confidentiality:

Can we think together about letting your parents know?



Examine for physiological consequences

Anxiety



Signs of malnourishment

Check hair and teeth Dehydration May well

Postural

Height and weight

Depression

May be less than minimally expected ↑ Less than 75% weight for height

May be normal or increased

Pressure sores

Russell's sign

Cardiovascular

Slow pulse <50 beats/

Δ Delayed tachycardia capillary refill

Decreased core temperature

Low blood pressure

⚠ Postural hypotension

Musculoskeletal



Spinal compression

> Osteoporotic fractures

Back or bone pain

Gastrointestinal

Tenderness

Constipation or ileus

⚠ Gastric dilation

Consider further investigations look for signs of eating disorder or differential diagnoses

Full blood count Anaemia

⚠ Hypophosphataemia

Bone profile

Blood glucose

Thrombocytopaenia

Neutropaenia 🔥 If significant

Low calcium, magnesium, or phosphate

Urea and electrolytes

⚠ Hyponatraemia ⚠ Hypokalaemia

test fail

Dehydration Electrolyte disturbance

ESR*

Possible organic cause

Bacterial infection

Thyroid function tests Hyperthyroidism

ECG[†]

Prolonged QTc

bradycardia

<u></u> ∧ >450 ms

Signs of electrolyte disturbance Sinus ∧ <50 beats/min
</p>



Differential diagnosis

Alternative explanations for weight loss include:

Diabetes Coeliac disease

Malignancies

Eating disorders are associated with increased rates of other mental health disorders, including:

Depression Anxiety

Obsessive compulsive disorder

Alcohol misuse/dependence

Management and referral

If you think they have an eating disorder, consider referral to a specialist child and adolescent eating disorder team. Most young people with eating disorders can be be treated as outpatients. Signs and symptoms marked with $\underline{\Lambda}$ may require emergency treatment.

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