

Eating disorders: myths debunked



Myth

Eating disorders are not serious; they are a life-style choice or about vanity.

Truth

Eating disorders are serious and potentially life-threatening mental illnesses. A person with an eating disorder experiences severe disturbances in their behaviour around eating, exercising and related self-harm because of distortions in their thoughts and emotions.

Myth

Eating disorders are a cry for attention or a person 'going through a phase'.

Truth

Due to the nature of an eating disorder a person may go to great lengths to hide behaviour, or may not recognise that there is anything wrong. Eating disorders are not a phase and will not be resolved without treatment and support.

Myth

Families, particularly parents, are to blame for eating disorders.

Truth

There is no evidence that a particular parenting style causes eating disorders. Although a person's genetics may predispose them to developing an eating disorder this is certainly not the fault of their family.

Myth

Dieting is a normal part of life.

Truth

Eating disorders almost invariably occur in people who have engaged in dieting or disordered eating. Dieting is also associated with other health concerns including depression, anxiety, nutritional and metabolic problems, and, contrary to expectation, with an increase in weight.

Myth

Eating disorders only affect white, middle-class females, particularly adolescent girls.

Truth

Eating disorders can affect anyone. They occur across all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and can affect people of all ages, from children to the elderly, and all genders.