

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Mental Health & Wellbeing

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy**

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Eating disorders

We all experience unhealthy eating habits from time to time. For some people, these habits can become persistent and difficult to curb. An eating disorder is an unhealthy eating behaviour that may develop from a variety of factors including societal influences, interpersonal perceptions, and/or as a way of coping with things or experiences in your life which may trigger certain emotions or may elicit a loss of control.

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What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are tied to our relationship with food, where we may be eat too little or too much food. But, eating disorders extend beyond food. You may feel like you have lost control over how your body should look like or want control over a certain aspect of your life. These eating behaviours can slowly become part of how you view yourself. Your emotions can become strongly centred on feeling guilty, ashamed or disgusted. These recurring behaviours and emotions can feel like your eating disorder is ingrained in your personality and impact every aspect of your life.

Many people with an eating disorder, may feel their experience is not severe enough to need professional help. However, with the right support and resources you can rewrite your journey to better health.

Eating disorders often begin with dieting or over-exercising. Other factors may lead individuals to reinforce their eating behaviours. These include:

- ▶ **Family factors**, where there is a family history of eating disorders.
- ▶ **Individual factors** such as having low self-esteem, unrealistic body perception and perfectionism
- ▶ **Environmental factors** through the influence of social media and social pressures around body image.
- ▶ **Life factors** that can trigger feelings of stress, anxiety and trauma.

Evidence shows, there are common signs that a person's experiences may be indicative of an eating disorder.

- ▶ **Changes in behaviour** – This may range from using food as a way to manage or express your emotions, fasting, skipping meals, overeating or self-inducing vomiting.
- ▶ **Changes in thoughts and feelings** – Fearing weight gain, worrying about places and events that involve food or constantly thinking about weight and body appearance.
- ▶ **Changes in body** – Having fluctuations in body weight, experiencing concentration difficulty or feeling tired with low energy.

Strategies to manage eating disorders

Taking the first step to seek support can be an incredibly difficult thing. But the care that you receive along the way can help you to get your life back on track.

Here are a few self-help tips to support you making a start to recovery:

- ▶ **Reach out for support from the people you trust.** This could be a close friend, family members or a counsellor at university. Knowing that you're not alone on this journey is important and can give you the

strength and empowerment you need to begin recovery. Being open and honest with the people you trust about what you are feeling will help you find a voice and self-acceptance.

- ▶ **Reconnect with who you are.** Constantly thinking about your eating disorder and the challenges that you've faced can make you forget who you really are as a person. Your interests, hobbies and achievements can feel distanced from you. Part of your recovery journey is about getting to know yourself again so you can rebuild your identity. You may try to re-engage with all your pastime hobbies or experiment and enjoy new things. This will help you come along and re-define yourself.
- ▶ **Be kind to yourself.** Your recovery journey will take the necessary time in order for you to heal and reconnect with your true self. Things may not go the way you imagined. There will be hurdles and experiences to overcome, but they will help you come out stronger and more defined. You can keep a journal along the way, to help you keep your energy and determination, remind you of your small wins and achievements and the resilience that you showed.

Eating disorder plan

Visiting your local General Practitioner (GP) can be a great place to start your recovery journey. Anyone experiencing an eating disorder is able to access a practice model treatment known as an "Eating Disorder Plan (EDP)". This plan provides you with up to 20 Medicare-subsidised sessions with a dietician. You also have access to 40 sessions with a mental health clinician for a period of 12 months. You can access further information on eligibility through the [butterfly foundation](#).

Your GP will also provide you with a referral to a team of professional who have specialty in eating disorders. These members may include:

- ▶ A registered dietician
- ▶ Psychologist
- ▶ Medical or dental specialists

Your support treatment team will work together with you to determine what your needs and priorities are and come up with goals that you will work towards. They will also:

- ▶ **Develop a treatment plan** – setting up treatment goals for treating your eating disorder and it gives clarity on things you are able to achieve and things that may need modification.
- ▶ **Treat any physical complications** – this will involve addressing any health or medical issues that are a result of your eating disorder.
- ▶ **Identify resources**- Collaborating with your treatment team to identify resources and strength within you and your environment to help you along your recovery journey. This includes health professionals, family and friends and community programs.
- ▶ **Psychotherapy** - Psychotherapy makes a very important part of your recovery journey. It involves seeing a psychologist or another mental health professional regularly, to work toward your treatment plan goals. Psychotherapy may include:

- **Cognitive behaviour therapy**- focusing on behaviours, thoughts and feelings that you may have related to your eating disorder. Overtime, you'll be able to recognise changes or harmful thoughts that trigger certain eating disorder behaviours.
- **Family-based therapy** – This focuses on providing you support with the help of your family members who learn to help you restore healthy eating habits/patterns.
- **Nutrition education** - Working with a dietician you will be able to better understand your eating disorder to help you develop and maintain healthy eating habits. Nutrition goals may include
 - Working toward a health weight
 - Understanding how nutrition affects your body
 - Practice meal planning
 - Establish regular eating patterns
 - Correct health problems due to malnutrition or binge eating

Eating disorders and my studies

Eating disorders can make it hard to manage due dates, stay organised, avoid procrastination and focus on assignments, all of which can make doing well at university harder. However, there are lots of strategies you can try to help support you in your studies, you just need to find the right ones that work for you.

- ▶ **Obtain Social Support:** Having supportive people in your life is the key to balancing recovery and your studies. This may mean reaching out to your existing network or confiding in a friend can provide you with the [social support](#) you need. There are also free online support groups from [The Butterfly Foundation](#).
- ▶ **Goal setting:** Balancing recovery and university can become hectic but allowing yourself to plan ahead and set goals (and achievement of sub goals) can assist in encouraging your progress along the way.
- ▶ **Connect with a member of the Counselling Service:** It can be helpful to have a contact person at university to connect and chat with if you are struggling during your day-to-day schedule at university. Having support both at home and at university can provide a strong basis and continuity of care. You can find the contact details below.

University Support

WSU resources:

If eating disorders are creating barriers that may affect your study or you want support to optimise your study then the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- ▶ **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email counselling@westernsydney.edu.au

- ▶ **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email disability@westernsydney.edu.au or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- ▶ **WSU [Student Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- ▶ **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au.

- ▶ **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- ▶ **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

▶ **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

● **Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

▶ **Leave of absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

Community Support

Community resources:

▶ [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**

Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).

- ▶ **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

[Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#) - 1800 011 511

This Mental Health Line is staffed by mental health professionals that can help and provide you advice about your needs and discuss referrals to local mental health services. It is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

- ▶ **[Butterfly foundation](#)**: provides support services, treatment and resources for delivering prevention and early intervention programs for anyone with an eating disorder or body image issues. Support is also available through counsellors through phone calls, web support and email. 1800 33 4673. Support groups are offered online through Zoom and lead by specialised therapists. Programs are both evidence based and skill focused for anyone experiencing or recovering from an eating disorder. They look at engaging with your healthy self, looking at positive thinking, and providing inspiration toward renewed hope for recovery. Programs are available for a reduced Fee and can be enrolled [through here](#).
- ▶ **[The National Eating Disorder Collaboration](#)** (NEDC): Brings together information about eating disorders from current research, experts and stakeholders and makes it accessible for everyone. Information is available on improving health outcomes, prevention and early intervention.
- ▶ **[ReachOut](#)** is an internet service for young people that provides information, support and resources about eating disorders. They have tools and advice on improving eating patterns and mental health.
- ▶ **[Headspace](#)** offers resources and services for younger people to better understand and manage eating disorders. Support can be found through tele-web or face-to-face at their centres across the nation.

Resources

- ▶ [Podcasts](#)
- ▶ [Videos](#)
- ▶ [Apps](#)

Podcasts

“How do you know it’s an eating disorder?”

The Butterfly Foundation has developed their own podcast, Butterfly: Let's Talk. In this episode, Dr. Simon Wilksch discusses the most commonly asked question on the Butterfly helpline, "how do you know it's an eating disorder?"

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0C0tWZjUULscmFFPiCligc?si=438fa700e7a14a97>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/how-do-you-know-its-an-eating-disorder/id1515862158?i=1000568948734>

"5 Things to Focus on In the Eating Disorder Recovery Process [HEAL]"

The Recovery Warrior Show focuses on instilling a sense of hope for those especially disheartened by the recovery process. To aid those in moving forward, this episode discusses and emphasizes the person's journey.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3s37ujyg5rnu9XJh24tsRx?si=e8951a3b89ce43be>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/5-things-to-focus-on-in-the-eating-disorder-recovery/id881265212?i=1000580463189>

Videos

Eating Disorders 101

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beIheAeLbWQ&ab_channel=NEDCAustralia

Eating Disorders from the Inside Out: Laura Hill at TEDxColumbus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEysOExcwrE&ab_channel=TEDxTalks

Apps

If you require ongoing support on your recovery journey in addition to your mental health service providers, using Apps on your phone can provide additional support

- ▶ **Recovery record:** eating disorder management: This app allows you to manage your recovery by keeping a record of your meals, thoughts and feelings. It allows a customisable meal plan, learning coping mechanisms and focusing on your goals.
 - ([iOS](#) / [Android](#))
- ▶ **Rise Up + Recover:** An eating disorder monitoring and management tool: This app relies on self-monitoring as a basis for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). It allows you to log your meals, emotions and behaviours and set reminders to keep you moving on track. It can also be shared with your treatment team.
 - ([iOS](#) / [Android](#))
- ▶ **MindShift CBT:** This app utilises the practice of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), helping you understand interactions between your behaviour and thoughts. It helps you develop strategies to manage negative behaviours.
 - ([iOS](#) / [Android](#))

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).

References:

[Western Sydney University- Disruption to Studies Policy](#)

[Western Sydney University- Withdrawing without academic penalty](#)

[Western Sydney University- Counselling Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- Student Welfare Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- WesternNow](#)

[Western Sydney University- Chaplaincy](#)

[Western Sydney University- TalkCampus](#)

[Beyond Blue- Online chat](#)

[The Butterfly Foundation – Eating Disorders](#)

[The National Eating Disorder Collaboration \(NEDC\)](#)

[Reach Out – Eating Disorders](#)

[Headspace – Eating Disorders](#)

[Inside Out Institute for Eating Disorders](#)