

Eating Disorders

A Young Healthwatch investigation into support
available in Bath and North East Somerset.

This Report was written by Abigail Williams who is studying Health and Social Care at College and is on placement with Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset based on research and her personal experience.

What are eating Disorders?

An eating disorder is something to do with mental health, it links to your mental health as it is the way you see food and how your mind set is towards it. There are different types of eating disorders for example bulimia and anorexia which are mirrored in a way. There is a binge eating disorder and other specified disorders. An eating disorder is a diagnosed medical condition that is based on your eating patterns, this involves having medical examinations on your weight, blood and body mass index. Having an eating disorder means you either have a difficult or unhealthy relationship with food.

When you are diagnosed with an eating disorder it is about how you see and view food. Some people could look at an orange and chocolate bar and think if I eat that chocolate bar, I will gain two pounds and if you eat the orange, I will lose two pounds it's all about mind set. See someone else may think I will have the orange now and then the chocolate bar later as a treat. It's about viewing food in healthy ways.



“I struggled with an eating disorder a few years ago when my nan passed away. It was a very tough time for me, and food just seemed to be a main priority.”



If you went to the doctor to get a diagnosis but the doctor couldn't work out what type of eating disorder, you had they wouldn't categorise. If you understand your thoughts and feelings towards food, it can be very helpful and help solve the problem easier and that way you will be able to find ways to manage it.

An eating disorder can affect anyone there isn't any specific individuals it can affect. It is more of a mindset and if you view food good and bad or think negatively about it then an eating disorder is something you can develop and become diagnosed with.

There are other forms of eating disorders like anorexia nervosa which is when you try and control your weight by not eating enough food and exercising too much. Bulimia is losing control over how much you eat and then taken extreme measures so that you don't put on weight. The binge eating disorder is when you eat large portions of food and keep going until you feel more than full, you eat until you feel like being sick.

Eating disorders can be linked to mental health or experience in life like loss of a loved one you were really close to. For example, someone with depression could not eat as they feel too low to have an appetite which can lead to anorexia. An individual with anxiety may eat more to try and calm their nerves and it can be used as a coping technique and this then links to bulimia.

An eating disorder can also come from something that has happened in your life and if your mind isn't right then your body won't be right the mind and body and connected and it's amazing how it works. If you stress or worry over something too much, then you can stop yourself from eating. An example is if you have exams coming in and they are extremely important with the amount of studying you are doing you can stress yourself out so much that you stop eating or stop your time of the month. Your time of the month is also linked to eating, when we are on our time of the month, we have cravings for certain food like chocolate for example but depending on how strong our cravings are is how much of it you eat.

What support is available?

When it comes to help and support around these issues there isn't a huge amount of help. Enough though there are a lot of individuals out there that struggle with eating disorders which also links to mental health because the brain is an amazing thing. The way we view things especially when it comes to food. There is the NHS of course but the location is a problem a lot of the time, where people live is it close enough to access or is it a two-bus journey just to get the help and support. There should be multiple places in different communities that are more accessible to individuals.

There is help out there, in Bath and Northeast Somerset, somewhere called Off the Record offers help and support. You can get a referral and they do virtual and in person support which is very useful but it is mainly online and some individuals may feel more comfortable talking about their feelings in person because you can tell how someone feels by their body language and it could help them to open up more.

The SWEDA, is an organisation in Northeast Somerset that helps individuals out who are struggling with an eating disorder, there are in person meetings that are run on the first Wednesday of every month. This group caters for anyone who has or has had an eating disorder, having a challenging relationship with food or their body, supports an individual with an eating disorder. You are welcome to bring a friend or family member along to give you that extra support if you need it.

They are an amazing organization and they have so much information on their website and have the resources on their website and in person to help individuals even if it is helping them to get the help they need like being referred to a doctor and getting a diagnosis that could be a start.

They have three steps which are engage, enable, and empower. Engage which is the first step for example just talking to someone about what you are going through. Enable so get involved with the services that they offer. Empower so you will have support every step of the way through your recovery.

Bath Mind is a service for mental health, and they help to make lifechanging changes. They offer one to one service as well as group services as talking to other people going through the same thing as you can be very beneficial, and you can learn strategies for yourself and make new friends along the way. There are lots of online resources available like self-help, wellbeing activities, information and tips, coronavirus and mental health and during lock down this is where mental health took a big hit as people couldn't go out the house and socialise with their friends they were just stuck in their houses and didn't really have anything to do. This helps with eating disorders greatly as a lot of eating disorders are linked to mental health. They say if your mind is not right or happy then neither is your stomach.

Better help, - this is a therapy that is affordable but like the others it is online and not everyone wants to discuss how they feel online



In my personal opinion when I went through a rough time with food I spoke to a nurse but it was on the phone as I have left school, but in person made me



feel more comfortable when it was in person and I could talk to them about how I felt and my body language gave off messages that I was comfortable and it enabled me to open up.

Beat, this is a national eating disorder society. They have help lines that are open 365 days a year, chatrooms where you can share your situations with others going through the same thing, resources like free downloads from self-help forms to GP forms. There isn't any in person face to face but there is lots of support on their website to look at which is very useful.

Overall, there is many places where you can get help and support from for eating disorders, they need somewhere that is local and not far away to travel to and travelling does a lot of money and if some individuals don't have the financial aspect to travel and they have a serious eating disorder than is becoming less and less manageable then they are going to be struggling a lot. More help and support need to be in more places especially across the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.

Support Available:

- Off The Record [Off The Record Bath and North East Somerset Off the Record Bath and North East Somerset \(offtherecord-banes.co.uk\)](http://offtherecord-banes.co.uk)
- SWEDA - [Somerset and Wessex Eating Disorders Association \(SWEDA\), England, UK \(swedauk.org\)](http://swedauk.org)
- Bath Mind - [Bath Mind - For better mental health](http://www.bathmind.org.uk)
- NHS- [Overview - Eating disorders - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
- BEAT- [The UK's Eating Disorder Charity - Beat \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](http://beateatingdisorders.org.uk)
- Talk-ed [Supporting someone with an eating disorder - TalkED \(talk-ed.org.uk\)](http://talk-ed.org.uk)
- Family Lives - [Bulimia, anorexia help and advice | Family Lives](http://www.familylives.org.uk)
- Young Minds - [Eating Disorders & Problems | Guide For Parents | YoungMinds](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)



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