

Eating and Drinking

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- Eating and drinking an adequate amount is essential for human growth and survival.
- A properly balanced diet is essential for the promotion of both physical health and emotional well being.
- In contemporary western society, food and drink and our relationship with food and drink, occupy a hugely important and prominent role.
- Most entertainment and social activities revolve around an intake of food and drink.
- The control of our food intake, through dieting, is a multi-million pound industry.
- Most adults occasionally use food and drink to improve their moods.

Children and young people's eating behaviour

- Very few young people reach the age of 18 without receiving criticism or advice about their eating at some point in their lives.
- Younger children are very often seen as fussy eaters.
- At some point in their adolescence, it is normal for young people, especially girls, to be dieting or considering dieting.
- Currently, there is much concern about childhood obesity. This is caused by children and young people eating and drinking too much of the wrong types of food and drink, not taking enough physical exercise and/or developing habits, such as eating chocolate bars, to boost their sense of emotional well being.
- In the vast majority of cases a change in a pattern of eating and drinking for a child or young person is a passing phase.
- In a minority of cases the pattern persists and starts to become harmful to the individual child. It is important to help these young people as early as possible.

Eating problems

A pattern of restricted eating and drinking which has got out of control is referred to as Anorexia Nervosa. The sufferer has become addicted to the apparent psychological benefits of extreme dieting and the sense of power and control this gives them over their emotions and sometimes other aspects of their lives. A typical sufferer will be very thin but will not experience themselves as such and will be oblivious to the physical danger they are putting themselves in.

Other changes in patterns of eating and drinking which can become persistent and unhealthy, and a challenge to turn around, include binge eating and vomiting and overeating. Binge eating and vomiting is sometimes called Bulimia Nervosa.

There is no simple cause of a child or young person developing a persistent pattern of eating and drinking which is harmful to them. Some might have been the victims of bullying. Some might have struggled to deal with strong or conflicting emotions following a trauma or a bereavement or divorce. Some might be using a relationship with eating and drinking to deal with low confidence or sense of self-worth. Some sufferers of anorexia nervosa have developed an image of themselves in which they feel compelled to try to be 'perfect' in everything they do and are therefore often high achievers at school. The way in which the mass media links images of thinness with positive values such as sexual attractiveness and career success is thought to be an important factor in triggering the onset of some eating problems.

Finally, children and young people sometimes develop patterns of eating and drinking which cause no physical harm but which interfere with their social functioning and development. These can include strange eating habits such as refusing to eat when others are present.