

Thinking about eating patterns

Your University at your side

Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton:

- provide free and confidential individual counselling
- offer non-judgemental support and understanding
- are professionally trained
- are experienced in dealing with a wide range of problems

Counselling can:

- help you to develop your strengths
- offer you the chance to focus on and understand your difficulties
- enable you to make positive decisions and changes
- help you to develop the skills and resources to cope
- help prevent small problems from becoming bigger

Get in touch

You can make an appointment to see a counsellor by filling out the Contact Us form at www.wlv.ac.uk/SSW, alternatively, you can come along to one of our drop-in services. For more information go to the web address above and click on the Mental Health and Wellbeing option. From here you will find a wealth of useful information and self-help tools as well as our Drop-ins and Group activities.

Thinking about eating patterns

Some of the problems around food and eating



Introduction

From time to time, people may experience changes in their eating patterns. This may occur for a number of reasons such as periods of stress, an illness or taking medication which may affect your appetite. For most people their eating will return to normal after a short period of time. However for some people, including both women and men, eating disorders are coping mechanisms used to deal with deeper rooted problems over a longer period of time.

Problems with food can range from not eating, to overeating or binge eating – as ways of coping with anxiety, stress, boredom, control issues, loneliness, guilt, an emotional void, low self esteem, etc.. Eating difficulties, therefore, can sometimes be the actual manifestation of some very difficult to express and/or traumatic experiences, and must be taken very seriously

Initially, eating disorders are the symptom of a problem. If the unhealthy eating behaviour continues, this can become a problem in itself and may take some time to resolve. There are a number of ways that different people experience eating problems and these usually fall into the following categories:

Anorexia

Individuals experiencing anorexia will see themselves as being larger than they actually are. Many of their thoughts are about weight control and the person usually has an intense fear of weight gain and will often exercise more than they need to in order to burn calories. They may use laxatives and vomiting to help control their weight and they may weigh less than is considered to be healthy by the medical profession.

Bulimia

People experiencing bulimia tend to alternate between severe weight control and binge eating (over eating when not hungry). Fasting (not eating for extended periods of time) and purging (making yourself vomit) can be part of this process. The use of laxatives and diuretics are also common factors.

Binge eating

People who binge eat do not tend to purge, fast or over-exercise. Rather, they will eat alone and eat to excess, even if they do not feel hungry and sometimes, until they are uncomfortably full.

Compulsive eating

This problem is similar to bulimia. Individuals can maintain a normal body weight which is achieved by having 'binge-free' periods in order to keep weight down. Individuals who eat compulsively may also snack throughout the day

If you are experiencing eating problems

You may be experiencing mixed feelings about your eating problem. These feelings may include embarrassment, shame, guilt, anxiety or fear that you will lose control over your life if you seek help.

If you have concerns about your eating habits then it is important that you seek support, such as counselling through the University Counselling Service, where you will have the opportunity to discuss your concerns in a supportive and understanding environment. It is important to seek medical advice from your Doctor. Maybe ask someone you trust to support you in doing this.

You may find it useful to keep a diary of your eating habits as this will help in your treatment and provide you with an opportunity to notice patterns in your eating habits. Remember that an eating disorder, if left untreated, could result in a number of serious health issues.

If you know someone who may be experiencing problems with eating

If you are worried about someone you know, talk to them about your concerns tactfully. Done in a caring and honest way your relationship is unlikely to be affected. You may be willing to help them access appropriate support, either through the University Counselling Service or their own Doctor. Alternatively you could direct them to one of the useful contacts listed overleaf.

Remember, try not to take on too much. Looking after yourself is important too.

You might like to read:

Freeman, C. (2009) *Overcoming Anorexia Nervosa*. London: Constable and Robinson Ltd.

Cooper, P. (2009) *Overcoming Anorexia Nervosa and Binge-Eating*. London: Constable and Robinson Ltd.

People you may want to contact:

- Your doctor
- NHS 111 – tel: 111
- Beat, information and help on all aspects of eating disorders – visit: www.b-eat.co.uk, tel: 0845 634 1414
- British Dietetic Association – tel: 0121 200 8080 or visit: www.bda.uk.com
- The Samaritans: 24 hour emotional support – tel: 01902 426422 or tel: 08457 90 90 90 or visit: www.samaritans.org.uk

“Counselling offered me a safe place where I could think about and explore things”

Other useful websites:

The Royal College of Psychiatrists
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/atozindex.aspx

Advice from Mind:

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/mental-health-a-z/

Useful leaflets:

www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp/

Health A-Z at:

www.nhs.uk

Free meditation exercises:

<http://franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness/>

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