

Eating disorders

Serious health conditions

Children's appetites may change at different ages and this is normal. Some children eat a lot or eat anything, others are more particular. Worries about weight, shape and eating are common, especially among young girls.

Eating disorders generally involve self-critical, negative thoughts and feelings about weight and food. More children under the age of twelve diet and are developing eating disorders. Anorexia nervosa and compulsive eating are the most common.

Celebrity culture which glorifies size zero figures, leaves an increasing number of young girls struggling to cope with their growing bodies. Children diagnosed with an eating disorder often have a history of early feeding problems.

Many children who develop an eating disorder have low self-esteem and their focus on weight can be an attempt to gain a sense of control at a time when their lives feel increasingly out of control. Eating disorders affect many more girls than boys, but boys do suffer from them too.

If you are worried about your child contact your GP or school nurse. The sooner a child gets help, the better their chances of a quick recovery. If you suspect something is wrong, talk to your child. Choose a good time, avoid mealtimes and interruptions from others and stay calm. With the right treatment and the right support, disorders can be beaten.

Anorexia and bulimia

These are serious mental health conditions that need professional help to diagnose and treat. Both are eating disorders and can lead to other physical and emotional problems. People with anorexia nervosa have an extreme fear of gaining weight and may starve themselves by only eating tiny quantities of food. A girl's periods may stop or never even start. They become preoccupied with their weight and shape and the weight of their friends and peers.

People with bulimia nervosa eat large amounts of food in binges and then make themselves sick to get rid of the food. They may not look overweight or underweight, and because of this their eating problems are often difficult to detect and children can become good at hiding this. Talk to your GP.

1
My daughter is nine and wants to be skinny.

2
Tell her this isn't a good look and explain to her that you love her as she is.

3
If you are really worried, and she's losing weight, discuss with your school nurse.