Children and young people with eating disorders

Guidelines for primary care professionals

These guidelines share advice about spotting the signs of eating disorders and when to refer children and young people to the community eating disorders service (CEDS) for specialist outpatient support.

Remember to refer ALL suspected children and young people with eating disorders to your local CEDS

- History of weight loss (> 1kg a week for 2 consecutive weeks) or failure to gain weight
- If no weight available has clothes size changed?
- Have parents noticed weight loss?
- How long has the young person been trying to lose weight & what have they tried?
- How much are they currently eating & drinking?
- Are they over exercising?
- If appropriate, when did they last have a menstrual cycle?
- Any risks?

Children and young people DO NOT need to be exceptionally underweight for a referral

- ‘Low weight’ is now defined as a loss of 10% of a young person’s expected body weight

When to refer

Refer ALL Children and Young People with a suspected eating disorder to your local CEDS

- Anxiety about gaining weight - behaviours to lose weight that are more than a ‘teenage diet’ such as extreme restricting or frequent binging
- Low, normal or overweight with the above behaviours
- Fainting, dehydration and confusion

Consent:

- Are both the young person & parent(s) aware of this referral?
- Who has given consent to this referral?

Include the physical exam

- Weight and height
- BP and pulse (sitting and standing)
- Temperature
- Send for blood tests at same time as referral: FBC, U+E’s, LFT, ESR, TFT, bone profile, Calcium, Magnesium

DO NOT DELAY REFERRAL WAITING FOR RESULTS!

Timescales

- Urgent assessment will be within 5 days
- 15 days if routine NICE concordant treatment within 28 days (note this is primarily family based treatment rather than individual)

Red flags

Phone your local CYP CEDS immediately

- not eating and fluid refusal for more than 24 hours
- cardiovascular compromise and fainting
- BMI <13; under 0.2nd centile
- BP <0.4th centile
- Pulse <40 bpm sitting and standing/postural drop
- Temperature <35˚C
- Weight loss > 1kg a week for 2 consecutive weeks
Eating disorders.
Know the first signs?

Lips
Are they obsessive about food?

Flips
Is their behaviour changing?

Hips
Do they have distorted beliefs about their body size?

Kips
Are they often tired or struggling to concentrate?

Nips
Do they disappear to the toilet after meals?

Skips
Have they started exercising excessively?

Online support
Visit beateatingdisorders.org.uk for information about eating disorders, and to access online support groups and one-to-one chat.
Use helpfinder.beateatingdisorders.org.uk to find services in your area.

For more referral information: helpfinder.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/refer

Beat is the UK’s eating disorder charity. We are a champion, guide and friend for anyone affected by an eating disorder.