

Condition:



Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa

Covered in this fact sheet

What is Anorexia Nervosa?	1
Anorexia Nervosa and work	2
How do I know if I have Anorexia Nervosa?	3
Causes of Anorexia Nervosa	4
Talking to you GP/Health professional	5
Treatments	6
Self-management	7
Useful links	9

What is Anorexia Nervosa?

Eating disorders are illnesses in which you experience severe disturbances in your eating behaviours and related thoughts and emotions. People with eating disorders typically become pre-occupied with food and their body weight.

In many cases, eating disorders may occur together with other psychiatric disorders like anxiety, panic, obsessive compulsive disorder, alcohol and drug abuse problems and body dysmorphia (distorted body image).

People with anorexia nervosa may see themselves as overweight, even when they are dangerously underweight. People with anorexia nervosa typically weigh themselves repeatedly, severely restrict the amount of food they eat, and eat very small quantities of only certain foods.

Anorexia Nervosa and work

Anorexia in itself is not a barrier to work however it can be a psychological or emotional response to stress or low moods in work.

Some common stressful factors may be:

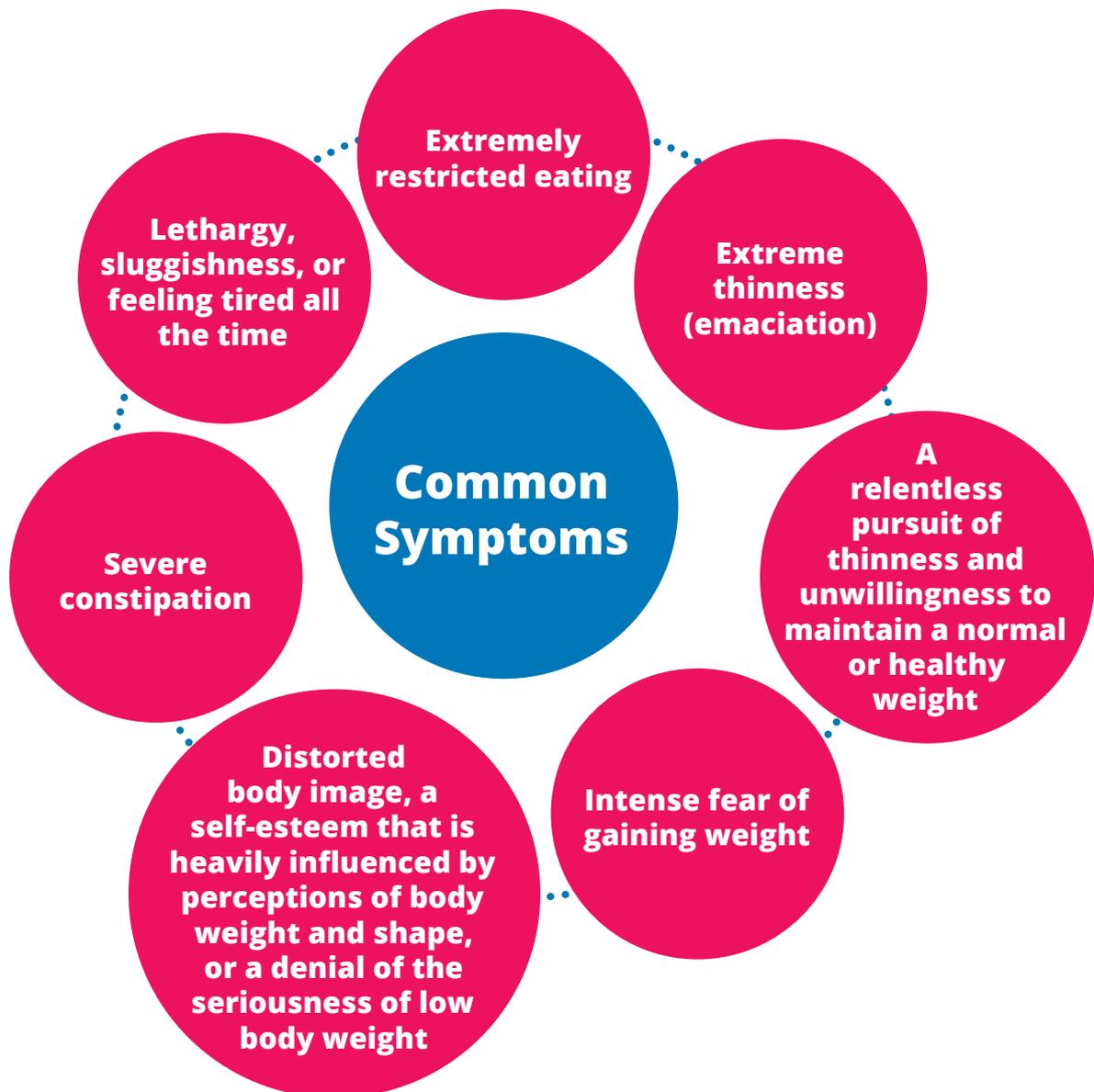
- Pressure of deadlines
- Not meeting work objectives or targets
- Feeling bullied or harassed at work
- Not having a social network of friends or friendly colleagues
- Feeling persecuted or discriminated by employer

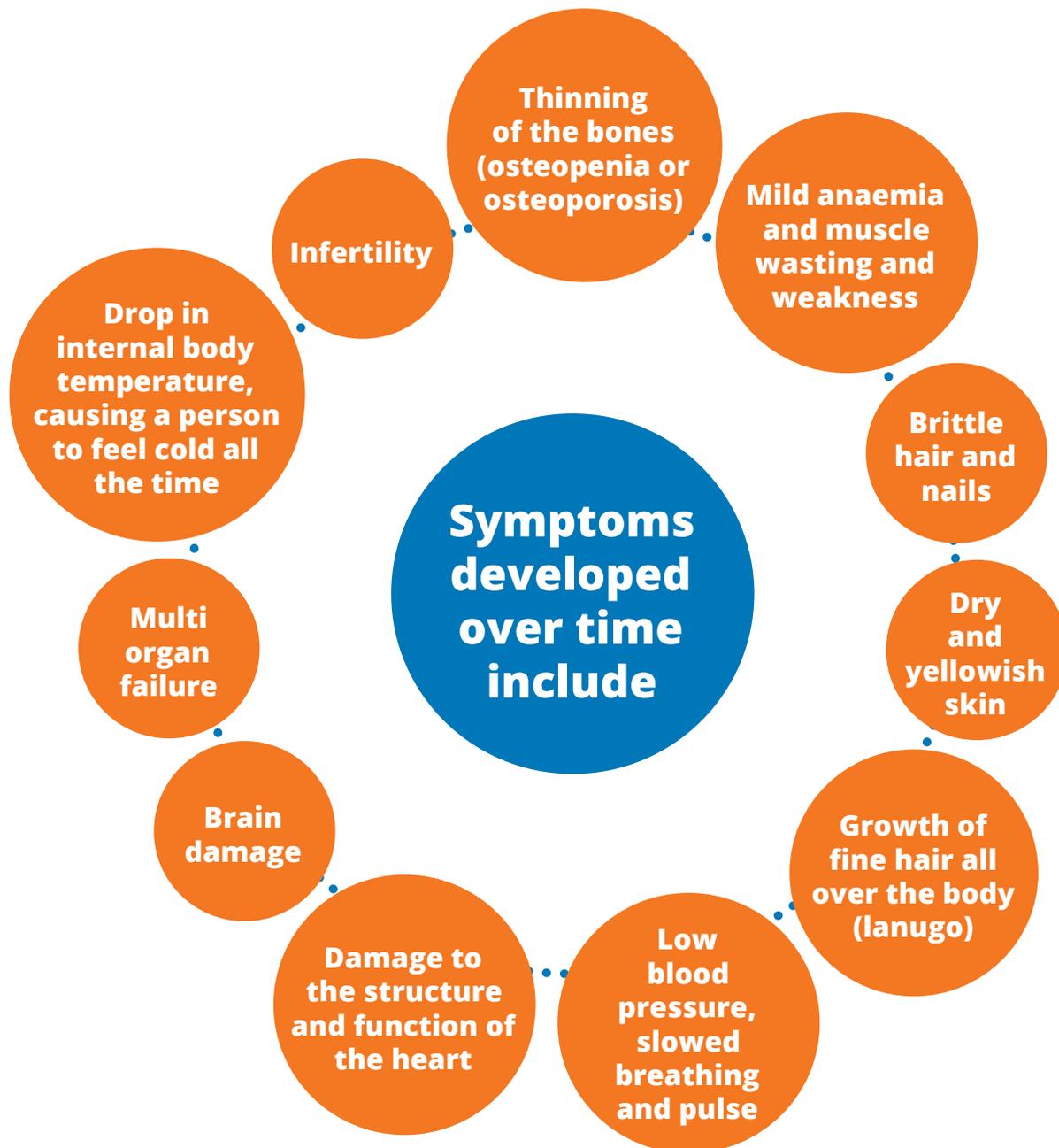
If you are anorexic then some of your symptoms can have an impact on you in your work place such as feeling ill, disorientated, sluggish or lethargic, this can potentially increase the health and safety risk at work or your performance.

It is recommended that you read through the self-management and self-care part of this worksheet to help develop more positive coping strategies to emotional distress whether this is at work or in your home/personal life.

How do I know if I have Anorexia Nervosa?

Here are some common symptoms that you may recognise.





Causes of Anorexia

Anorexia is associated with many different factors. This does not mean that any of these things have caused the problem. All we can say with any certainty is that certain events and situations are risk factors for someone to develop an eating disorder. Even if there is one very significant event in someone's life, it may or may not be responsible for creating or even maintaining the eating problem.

We do not know for certain, but important factors include:

- Control - losing weight can make someone feel good and in control.
- Longstanding unhappiness which may show itself through eating.
- Puberty - anorexia reverses some of the physical changes of puberty. You can see it as putting off some of the challenges of becoming an adult.
- Family - saying “no” to food may be the only way you can express your feelings.
- Depression - binges may start off as a way of coping with unhappiness.
- Low self-esteem.
- Social pressure - Western culture, particularly the media, idealises being thin.
- Genetics may play a part.

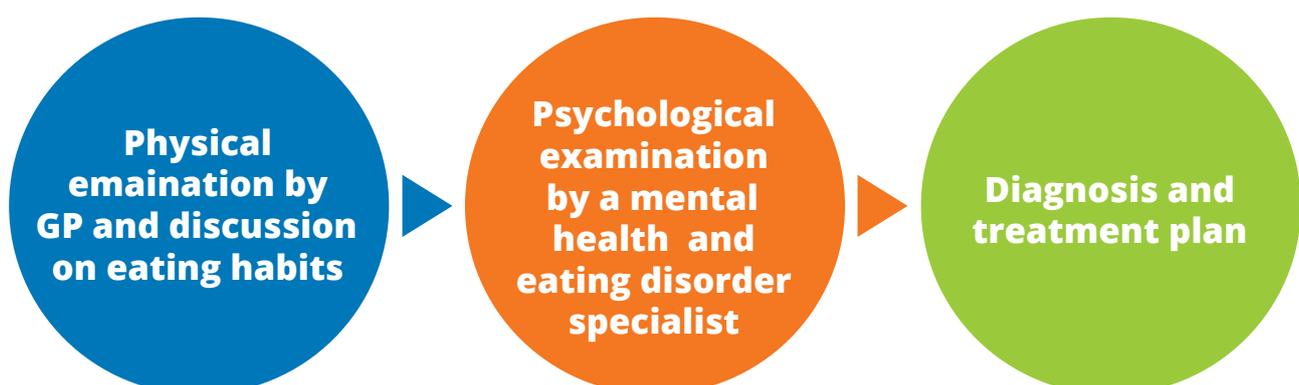
Talking to you GP/Health professional

Doctors will use physical and psychological evaluations to diagnose eating disorders. They'll also make sure that the person meets the diagnostic criteria for an eating disorder.

Doctors will not diagnose eating disorders solely based on a physical exam. A psychological evaluation by a mental health specialist is also required.

A mental health specialist will ask questions about eating habits. The goal is to understand the patient's attitude toward food and eating. The doctor also needs to get an idea of how the patient perceives their body.

The questions can be personal, especially when talking about dieting, bingeing, purging, or extreme exercise habits.



Recommended Treatments

Psychotherapy or counselling

Talking to a therapist about your thoughts and feelings can help you to understand how the problem started, and how you can change the ways you think and feel about things. They will also help you value yourself more, and rebuild your sense of self-esteem.

Advice and help with eating

A dietician may talk to you about healthy eating. They are experienced in talking about these experiences sensitively and will discuss them with you when you are ready.

Psychiatric support

A specialist will discuss with you when the problem started and how it developed. You will have your weight measured and will have a physical examination. Although this can be difficult for someone with anorexia, it will only be done with your permission and with time for you to prepare for it. With your permission, the specialist might want to talk with your family or a friend to see what light they can shed on the problem. Medication is not usually prescribed for anorexia alone, but it may be given for other symptoms, such as obsessive compulsive disorder and depression.

Hospital admission

This may be an option if you have lost so much weight that it is making you ill.

Compulsory treatment

This only happens if someone is so unwell that their life or health is in danger or they cannot make proper decisions for themselves and need to be protected.

Self-Management

There are some things you can do alongside medical treatment that can boost your mood. They can also help to distract you and look after your general health.



Take notice

Try to be more mindful of your surroundings and what you are experiencing as a result of that.



Connect

As mentioned above don't go it alone – talk and connect with other people even when you feel low.



Be Active

Set up an exercise contract and stick to it.



Give Back

Giving even when you feel very low can benefit you and others - give something back into the community or to people around you. For example get involved in a local project.



Keep learning

Learning something new works as both a distraction and a motivator - try to take opportunities that you have around you to learn something new and develop on skills that you already have.



Manage negative thinking

Thinking differently **STOPP!**
Pause, take a breath, don't react automatically Understand the links between **thoughts, feelings and behaviours** Use **Positive Self Talk**.



Healthy Eating

Keep a food diary; don't rush eating; eat with a trusted other; drink plenty of water.

Self-care

You can learn to manage your symptoms by looking after yourself. This is called 'self-care.' Self-care is how you manage your daily routine, relationships and how you are feeling. If you have an eating disorder it may help to improve your self-esteem. You could do this by:

- listing your good qualities,
- writing down the things you can do,
- learning a new skill,
- writing down your feelings,
- taking an assertiveness course to help your confidence, or
- writing about your life without an eating disorder.

It may help to think about what sets off your eating patterns. Certain times of year or events may make your eating worse. At those times you can ask for extra support from family or friends. You could try different things to improve how you see your body, such as:

- wearing clothes you feel comfortable in,
- not weighing yourself,
- doing nice things for your body, such as getting a massage or having a bath,
- Not reading fashion magazines and comparing yourself,
- magazines and comparing yourself.

Useful links

