

# Eating challenges & body image



It's natural to think about food, exercise, or how you look from time to time. But when these thoughts start to take over or impact your daily life, they might be signs of eating challenges or body dissatisfaction.

These experiences can affect how you feel, socialise, and manage everyday life. They can also lead to more serious challenges like eating disorders (EDs) or body image conditions.

**Eating challenges can affect anyone**

**regardless of age, gender, sexuality, cultural background, or body size.**

## Signs & effects

Eating challenges and body dissatisfaction can show up in different ways for different people. Some common experiences include:



### Excessive worry

Thoughts about food, weight, or appearance feel constant.



### Guilt/shame after eating

You might avoid meals, eat in secret, or try to 'make up for' food.



### Rigid routines

Missed workouts or different meals feel stressful.



### Using food/exercise to cope

Eating for comfort or cutting back to feel in control.



### Comparing your body to others

Feeling like you don't measure up or need to change.



### Avoiding mirrors/photos

Feeling uncomfortable seeing yourself or being in pictures.

**It's important to know these feelings and behaviours aren't choices you've made. They're part of how eating challenges can affect both your mind and body.**

# Causes

Eating challenges and body dissatisfaction can develop from a mix of experiences and influences, such as:

## Feeling pressure to look a certain way

Social media, beauty standards, or comments from others can make you feel like your body needs to change.

## Going through tough experiences

Things like bullying, teasing, or difficult times with food and body image can stay with you.

## Managing changes in physical health

Illness, injury, or other health challenges can affect how you eat and how you see your body.

## Growing up around certain messages

Dieting, criticism, or strong beliefs about food and bodies in your family or culture can shape how you feel about yourself.

## Struggling with self-worth or control

Low confidence, perfectionism, or wanting to feel in control can sometimes play a part.

## Finding ways to cope with feelings

Sometimes food, exercise, or focusing on your body can feel like ways to manage stress or tough emotions.

Experiencing eating and body image challenges is never your fault. Whatever the cause, there are ways to navigate what you're feeling.

# Recognising when and how triggers shows up

Having a plan like below can help you prepare for situations that might trigger eating and body image challenges. This can make it easier to spot what's happening and respond in ways that support your wellbeing.

## Trigger management plan

**Anticipate** What might trigger my eating challenges?  
e.g., social media, dinner invitation, stress at work

**Identify** How might I feel or respond?  
e.g., urge to restrict food, exercise, or use negative self-talk

**Manage** What can I do to care for myself?  
e.g., do a grounding technique, call a friend, or talk to a health professional



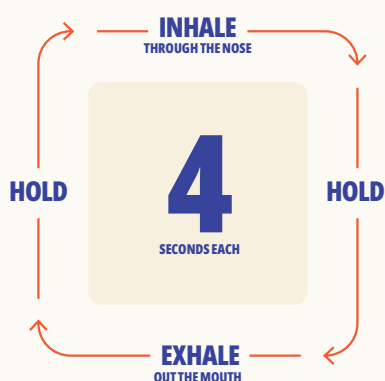
# Practical management strategies

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**Notice your triggers**  
 Recognising certain situations, emotions, or thoughts can help you feel more prepared.
- 
**Shift your focus**  
 If urges feel strong, try journaling, moving your body, or talking to someone you trust.
- 
**Try a grounding technique**  
 Deep breathing or focusing on your surroundings can ease urges and help you feel more present.
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**Create a supportive space**  
 Limiting social media or diet talk can ease pressure and reduce negative self-comparisons.
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**Be kind to yourself**  
 Healing takes time. Every small effort counts, and showing yourself compassion can make a big difference.
- 
**Let go of tracking numbers**  
 Stepping away from calorie counting, weight checks, or exercise stats can help build a healthier relationship with food and your body.

## Want to try something now?

If you're feeling distressed or unsure where to start, a grounding technique like **box breathing**, **reciting something in order**, or **using your five senses** can help ease distress and shift your focus away from what's causing distress.

### BOX BREATHING



### RECITING TECHNIQUE

You can try reciting:

- the alphabet
- the months, backwards
- what you did yesterday



### 5 SENSES TECHNIQUE

Look for...

-  5 things you can **see**
-  4 things you can **feel**
-  3 things you can **hear**
-  2 things you can **smell**
-  1 things you can **taste**



Everyone is different, so what works for someone else might not work for you, and that's okay.

The key is to keep experimenting until you find what helps you most.

Wherever you are, help is at your fingertips with the **Support Toolkit**

 [lifeline.org.au/toolkit](https://lifeline.org.au/toolkit)

# When to seek help

You may want to speak to a health professional if:

- ✓ Thoughts about food, eating, or body image feel constant or overwhelming.
- ✓ You feel stuck, hopeless, or unsure how to break unhelpful patterns.
- ✓ You're avoiding meals, eating in secret, or feeling guilty after eating.
- ✓ You use food or exercise control to cope with stress or big feelings.
- ✓ Worrying about food or your body is impacting your relationships, work, or daily life.
- ✓ Physical symptoms like dizziness, tiredness, or changes in weight are affecting you.

## Reaching out can feel difficult, but it's a sign of strength.

Support is always available to help you feel more in control and hopeful for the future.

# Support is available

Understanding and managing eating challenges and body image isn't something you have to do on your own.

Head to our **Support Toolkit** to learn more about eating and body image and the national and local support services that can help.

The Support Toolkit also offers information on a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics you can explore at your own pace, whenever you need.

Visit [lifeline.org.au/eating-and-body-image/services](https://lifeline.org.au/eating-and-body-image/services) or scan the QR code to get started.



**If you're feeling overwhelmed right now, Lifeline is here to support you.**

You can reach us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ Call 13 11 14

✉ Text 0477 131 114

💬 Chat online at [lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat](https://lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat)

**If your life is in danger, please call 000.**

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