

# Face up to eating disorders, and seek help

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A new study has found young people are leaving it 'too late' to seek help for eating disorders, citing fear of losing control over their eating or weight, denial, and failure to perceive the severity of the illness as reasons not to get professional advice.

The recent online survey of almost 300 Australian young adults aged 18-25 years found a majority had eating, weight or body shape concerns,

and even those with anorexia or bulimia reportedly found reasons to delay getting treatment or expert interventions.

The first author of the study, Kathina Ali, Research Associate in Psychology at Flinders University, explains that concern for others and the belief one should solve their own problems were the two most common barriers towards seeking help for eating concerns.

"Not wanting others to worry about their problems was the highest endorsed barrier—it reflects the wish for autonomy and also the fear of being a burden to others in this group of young adults."

Feeling embarrassed about their problems or fearing that other people do not believe eating [disorders](#) are real illnesses even prevented young adults experiencing symptoms of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa from seeking help, says fellow psychology researcher Dr. Dan Fassnacht.

"Concerningly, only a minority of people with eating disorder symptoms had sought professional help and few believed they needed help despite the problems they were experiencing," says Dr. Fassnacht, Flinders University Psychology Lecturer, co-author of a new paper just published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*.

In the research article, entitled "What prevents young adults from seeking help? Barriers toward help-seeking for eating disorder symptomatology," the Australian and German researchers recommended clinicians (counsellors, [health workers](#) and others) and the public be made aware of these barriers.

More information and education about the severity and the impact of eating disorders—and how symptoms can get worse without interventions or treatment—should be available to [young adults](#), including the importance of seeking help, and self-management

strategies.

Helpful and free evidence-based [online resources](#) are available at websites such as Australia's Butterfly Foundation and the National Eating Disorders Collaboration.

**More information:** Kathina Ali et al, What prevents young adults from seeking help? Barriers toward help-seeking for eating disorder symptomatology, *International Journal of Eating Disorders* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/eat.23266](#)

Provided by Flinders University

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