

Eating disorders in the Perinatal Period

Do you work with new or expectant mums?

Do you feel equipped to spot the signs of a potential eating disorder?

How confident would you feel supporting a woman with current or historic experience of an eating disorder during the perinatal period?

Eating disorders during the perinatal period can be severely detrimental to the mental and physical health of both mother and baby.



"My life was a constant tug of war between the part of me that so desperately wanted this beautiful baby to thrive, and the bullying, demanding and punishing voice which convinced me that gaining weight would, quite literally, be a fate worse than death."

"I felt truly possessed by this untouchably powerful force which overrode every healthy, intuitive and protective instinct I had."

The Stats

- **5.3%** of pre-partum and **12.8%** of post-partum mothers screen positive for disordered eating behaviours.
- **16%** of pregnant women will have experienced an eating disorder at some time.
- **50%** of women who have had an eating disorder historically will relapse within 12 months of delivery.
- **1 in 3** mothers with an underlying eating disorder develop postnatal depression in comparison to 3-12% in the general population.
- At all times during pregnancy and the postnatal period, women with an eating disorder experience an increased rate of depressive symptoms.

The Risks

- Labour complications
- Poor nutrition
- Dehydration
- Higher rate of miscarriage
- Cardiac irregularities
- Gestational diabetes
- Premature birth
- Difficulties breastfeeding
- Postnatal depression
- Delayed development
- Low birth weight for age
- Respiratory distress

Only 6% of people with an eating disorder are ever clinically underweight, and eating disorders affect people of all weights, shapes, ages, backgrounds, and sexualities.

“I reached out to my midwife, my obstetrician, and my GP... I knew something was badly wrong. But my concerns were consistently dismissed. They said that because my baby was growing fine and I was a “healthy” BMI, I obviously couldn’t have an eating disorder. I felt like an incubator – like my own health, and certainly my mental health, didn’t matter in the slightest.”

Wednesday’s Child Perinatal Services



For professionals working with new or expectant mothers:

- Free e-learning module, ‘Eating Disorders in the Perinatal Period’
- Bespoke training delivered by our Perinatal Lead
- Lived-experience speakers
- Webinars



For new or expectant mothers:

- 1:1 befriending delivered by lived-experience volunteers
- E-learning modules:
 - Pregnancy and Eating Disorders
 - Eating Disorders and Early Motherhood
- 1:1 or family therapy with specialist eating disorder psychologists

“This is such an important and much-needed module. There’s nothing else out there like it. I learned an incredible amount, and having such a variety of lived experience insights really brought the subject to life.”

Alex H, mental health nurse

“Wow... what a powerful, informative, and inspiring presentation – absolutely what training should be. What Abi [Perinatal Lead] shared will have real, practical implications for my future practice.”

Donna L, Perinatal & Infant Mental Health Champion,
Institute of Health Visiting

“Really impactful, and has given me a great deal more knowledge and confidence to be able to support women with eating disorders.”

Anna R, student midwife, University of Hull