

What are Other Specified Feeding and Eating Disorders?

Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorder (OSFED) is a term used to describe characteristics of a “feeding or eating disorder that cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning predominate but do not meet the full criteria for any of the disorders in the feeding and eating disorders diagnostic class” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

OSFED carries the same level of psychological and physical consequences as other eating disorder diagnoses.

OSFED includes the following presentations:

Atypical Anorexia Nervosa

The person meets full criteria for Anorexia Nervosa, however despite significant weight loss, the individual's weight remains within or above a normal weight range.

Bulimia Nervosa (of low frequency and/or limited duration)

The person meets full criteria for Bulimia Nervosa, however, the binge eating and compensatory behaviours occur less than once a week and/or for less than 3 months.

Binge Eating Disorder (of low frequency and/or limited duration)

The individual meets full criteria for Binge Eating Disorder, however the binge eating behaviours occur less than once a week and/or for less than 3 months.

Purging Disorder

The person engages in purging (e.g. self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics or other medications), however this occurs in the absence of binge eating.

Night Eating Syndrome

The individual engages in recurrent episodes of excessive food consumption after the evening meal, or after awakening from sleep. There is awareness and recall of eating, and it is not better explained by external influences such as changes in the individual's sleep-wake cycle, by local social norms, or attributable to another medical condition or effect of medication. The night eating causes significant distress and/or impairment in functioning.

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed. Text Revision). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

Treatment Options

The best treatment for people experiencing OSFED will depend on their symptoms. If the symptoms are like Anorexia Nervosa, then the treatment should be the same as for someone with Anorexia Nervosa. Similarly, if the symptoms are more like Bulimia Nervosa or Binge Eating Disorder, then treatment should follow those approaches.

It is of paramount importance that people who fall into this diagnostic category are not deterred from seeking treatment for their eating disorder. The OSFED diagnosis can be severe and life-threatening.

“It took me a long time to get support. I always felt like I wasn't sick enough because I didn't meet the criteria for one of the traditional eating disorders. I've since realised that was just another way for the illness to convince me that I didn't need help, even though I was really unwell”

- Kath, 43