Anorexia (www.nhs.uk/conditions/anorexia)

**Summary**

**Anorexia is an eating disorder and serious mental health condition.**

People who have anorexia try to keep their weight as low as possible by not eating enough food or exercising too much, or both. This can make them very ill because they start to starve.

They often have a distorted image of their bodies, thinking they are fat even when they are underweight.

Men and women of any age can get anorexia, but it's most common in young women and typically starts in the mid-teens.

**Symptoms**

Signs and symptoms of anorexia include:

* if you're under 18, your weight and height being lower than expected for your age
* if you're an adult, having an unusually low body mass index (BMI)
* missing meals, eating very little or avoiding eating any foods you see as fattening
* believing you are fat when you are a healthy weight or underweight
* taking medication to reduce your hunger (appetite suppressants)
* your periods stopping (in women who have not reached menopause) or not starting (in younger women and girls)
* physical problems, such as feeling lightheaded or dizzy, hair loss or dry skin

**Strategies**

* some sufferers or families have a history of eating disorders, depression, or alcohol or drug addiction so be careful/sensitive about questions/comments
* Do not criticise eating habits, body shape or weight
* Some sufferers are overly concerned with being slim, particularly if they also feel pressure from society or their job – for example: ballet dancers, jockeys, models or athletes – emphasise that we don’t all have to look like models!
* Sufferers generally have anxiety, low self-esteem, an obsessive personality or are perfectionists – so use confidence building strategies
* There may be a history of being sexually abused – be careful/sensitive of making comments