



The Assessment of Adult Bulimia

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Hidden morbidity:

- Less than 50% of patients with bulimic disorders are identified in general practice.
- They have an increased chance in presenting with other symptoms such as anxiety, depression, gastrointestinal symptoms and menstrual problems.
- Patients may also be 'hidden' in general psychiatry settings.

Support can be offered to general practitioners by:

- encouraging them to think about eating disorders;
- encouraging a positive attitude to eating disorders;
- providing information on relevant literature and websites;
- referencing to guidelines such as NICE and QIS guidelines;
- encouraging them to consider the use of the SCOFF questionnaire.

NB: Diabetic patients are at particularly high risk of physical problems if they also have an eating disorder. There should be an extra high level of vigilance for these patients.

Comprehensive assessment includes a standard psychiatric history and mental state examination with particular reference to:

- frequency and duration of binge eating and compensatory behaviours;
- development of over-concern about body weight and shape;
- any previous history of anorexia nervosa;
- assessing the degree of physical and social impairment;
- family history of eating concerns and eating disorders;
- premorbid obesity and dieting;
- childhood adversity;
- psychiatric comorbidity;

- physical symptoms of the eating disorder;
- risk assessment including physical risk and suicide risk;
- relevant laboratory investigations.

The assessment should make use of standardised questionnaires. The Eating Disorders Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q) is the best established.

The initial response can include:

- the offer of hope, encouragement, reassurance and support;
- early follow up;
- accessing services with the experience in the psychological treatment of bulimic disorders;
- information about self-help organisations, literature and local groups;
- an assessment of readiness to change;
- an introduction to principles of CBT and self monitoring;
- the prescription of fluoxetine at 60 mg per day.