

The Alder Hey EDYS team is made up of a wide range of professionals who work together to support the mental and physical health of our young Eating Disorders patients. The journey to recovery can be long and difficult, but their child-centred approach to each individual helps to support bright futures.

Sharon Becker is a Senior Specialist Dietician in the Eating Disorders team at Alder Hey. As part of our awareness campaign, Sharon explains the difference between Normal eating and Disordered eating.

“Recent studies suggest that 1 in 12 teenagers in the UK suffer from eating problems, so this is a very important issue. If you have an Eating Disorder it's likely that you've been behaving in a way towards eating and drinking that is disordered. This can make it hard to figure out what normal, balanced eating and drinking looks like.”

Sharon explained how the frequency of eating, portions and types of food are a vital part of supporting children and young people on the road to recovery, developing health minds and bodies and being able to thrive in the future.

“Ideally everyone functions best if they eat regularly throughout the day. This is a fundamental part of overcoming an Eating Disorder. The general guide for this and a good place to start is to eat something approximately every 3 hours. For many people, this means 3 meals a day and 2 or 3 snacks a day. The timing of this can be really variable but in the first stages of recovery we encourage young people to stick to a fixed pattern and plenty of fluids.”

A healthy balance of nutrients is vital for our physical and mental health, giving us the energy to get the best from our amazing bodies. For children and young people this is especially important for their development, cognitive function and building good habits for life.

Sharon explained how our diet should comprise the major food groups and that thinking about these proportions across the whole day can help to achieve and maintain this vital balance.

Carbohydrates 50-60% (eg. rice, bread, cereal, pasta)

Protein - 10-20% (eg. meat/fish/poultry/eggs/nuts/tofu)

Fats - 30% (eg. oil, butter, avocado) – this surprises some people!



“This should also include “treat” type foods, this is normal! It's absolutely okay to include some of these each day (eg. crisps, chocolate, cake) - this equates to normal, balanced, non-disordered eating.”

Sharon described the Treatment Stage of supporting our young EDYS patients.

“Whilst having treatment for an Eating Disorder, you may look unusual to an ‘average non eating disorder person’. You may have to monitor what you eat, plan your meals and snacks more closely and engage in more meal planning and preparation. This is actually a stepping stone away from an Eating Disorder to Normal Balanced Eating. Most people find that the further into their recovery they are, the more their eating becomes intuitive.”

We asked Sharon if it is possible for people with an Eating Disorder to fully recover and some of the key points that help to support this recovery.

“To be fully recovered from an Eating Disorder can be hard but it is achievable, and it means having greater flexibility and choice to join friends for a snack or attend a celebration without anxiety about food. This varies in response to individual's emotions, schedule, hunger and access to food. I always aim to support our patients to remember four main things –



regularity, variety, flexibility and fun.”

