



# PREPARING FOR SOCIAL EVENTS & USING COPING STRATEGIES

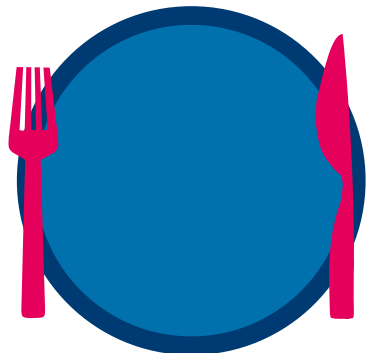
For sufferers of eating disorders (EDs), their friends, families and carers

Social events such as family celebrations and meeting up with friends can be a stressful experience for eating disorder sufferers. Typically, these gatherings focus on food and people eat together.

**TOP TIP!**  
REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT AND UNIQUE. WHAT MIGHT WORK FOR ONE ED SUFFERER MIGHT NOT WORK FOR ANOTHER. TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR LOVED ONE AND FIND OUT WHAT WORKS AND DOESN'T WORK FOR THEM.

**To prepare ED sufferers and those who care about them for social events, use these helpful preparation tips and coping strategies to enable the event to run smoothly.**

## BEFORE A MEAL



Before the event, it can be useful to think about the experience of eating from the sufferer's perspective and to try and understand what they are going through.

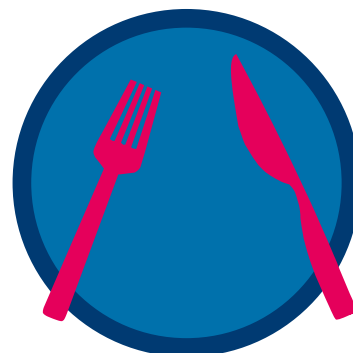
For sufferers, it can be equally useful to think about triggers and to communicate these to their friends and family ahead of the date.

### COMMON PROBLEMS ED SUFFERERS ENCOUNTER:

- People watching every mouthful the sufferer eats, or commenting on their eating habits and behaviours.
- Comments about portion sizes or choices of foods.
- Encouragement to eat more, or to eat 'fear foods' such as chocolate.
- Having to eat in front of lots of people.
- People being uneasy around the sufferer and not knowing what to say.
- Arguments about what and how much to eat.
- People commenting on weight, shape or diets.
- People mentioning how 'well' the sufferer looks, in recovery and this being interpreted as being overweight or having gained weight.
- Being rushed during a meal.

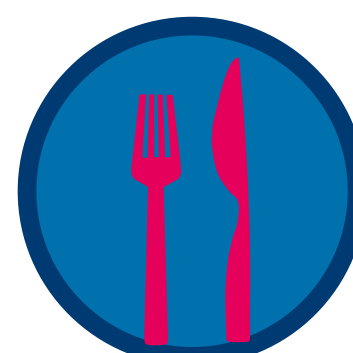
- It can be helpful for family and friends who know about the eating disorder to be aware that they shouldn't comment about appearance, portions or choice of foods.
- It can also be beneficial if family and friends educate themselves about EDs and understand the media's take on EDs is often unhelpful and inaccurate.
- To avoid stress and anxiety, the contents and serving size of a meal should be discussed in advance.
- Serving meals away from the table might be preferable, so the person avoids worrying about portion size.
- For buffets and self-service, it may be helpful for an ally to allow the sufferer to approach the table with them and copy their portion size.

## DURING A MEAL



- It can be helpful to initiate small talk or put on the radio. This will help to relieve any anxiety or tension.
- Understand that the struggle with the ED can be very preoccupying, so do not be alarmed if the sufferer doesn't engage much with the conversation.
- Give the sufferer space – don't sit too close to them, watch them closely while they eat or comment on their portion size.
- If there are family customs or rituals, assure the sufferer they don't need to participate if they are going to find it difficult.
- Offer subtle support – enquire if the sufferer needs someone to talk and offer to go somewhere private if you can see they are struggling.

## AFTER A MEAL



- It is normal to want to praise your relative after a meal. For some sufferers, the eating disorder makes them feel more shame and guilt.
- Others like their efforts to be acknowledged and are pleased that others see their achievement.
- Generally praise is accepted if it acknowledges the challenge that has been faced, for example: "I could see that was hard for you, well done."
- Many find it helpful to have an activity planned for after the meal, such as a board game, jigsaw or film.
- It's also good to encourage discussion and thinking about some light conversation topics in advance can help.

## SEEING THE POSITIVES IN SOCIAL EVENTS

- Social gatherings can be difficult, but they can also be a great opportunity to spend quality time together.
- With some prior communication and planning, they can run smoothly for both the sufferer and others present.
- Religious and cultural festivities, birthday parties and other events are great times to show you care and to feel cared for.
- Social events allow us to escape from the stresses of everyday life and spend time with the people we care about.



**"Knowing that I am in control of me and that I have the ability to come to my own decisions makes asking for help a lot easier, and the support even more valuable."**  
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