

Screening and assessment tools for eating disorders

Fact sheet for Primary Health Networks

There are several screening tools that can be used to assist in the early detection and diagnosis of eating disorders.

Screening tools are not diagnostic eating disorder tools but rather used to detect the possibility of an eating disorder and identify when a comprehensive assessment is warranted.

The Eating Disorder Screen for Primary Care (ESP) (1), SCOFF (2) and Eating Disorders Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q) (3) are evidence-based tools that have been validated for use in primary and specialist care settings.

Eating Disorder Screen for Primary Care (ESP)

1. Are you satisfied with your eating patterns?
2. Do you ever eat in secret?
3. Does your weight affect the way you feel about yourself?
4. Have any members of your family suffered with an eating disorder?
5. Do you currently suffer with, or have you ever suffered in the past, with an eating disorder?

- A 'no' to question 1 is classified as an abnormal response
- A 'yes' to questions 2-5 is classified as an abnormal response
- Any abnormal response indicates that the client needs further assessment.

SCOFF

- **S** – Do you make yourself Sick because you feel uncomfortably full?
- **C** – Do you worry you have lost Control over how much you eat?
- **O** – Have you recently lost more than One stone (6.35 kg) in a three-month period?
- **F** – Do you believe yourself to be Fat when others say you are too thin?
- **F** – Would you say Food dominates your life?

An answer of 'yes' to two or more questions indicates the need for a more comprehensive assessment. For further details regarding this, see the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of eating disorders (4).

A further two questions with SCOFF have been shown to have a high sensitivity and specificity to bulimia nervosa. These questions are not diagnostic but would indicate further questioning and discussion is required.

1. Are you satisfied with your eating patterns?
2. Do you ever eat in secret?

Eating Disorders Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q)

The EDE-Q is a self-report questionnaire providing a measure of the range and severity of eating disorder behaviours. It is not a diagnostic tool, however information from the EDE-Q can assist in forming an opinion on diagnosis, and the person's answers can form useful prompts for further investigation.

The EDE-Q is a compulsory component of the MBS Eating Disorders Plan (EDP) for all eating disorders except anorexia nervosa. A person must have an EDE-Q global score of greater than 3 to be eligible for an EDP. Patients with anorexia nervosa are eligible without any further criteria needing to be met.

The EDE-Q can be completed [online with automated scoring](#) and in [print format](#).

References

1. Cotton M, Ball C, Robinson J. Four simple questions can help screen for eating disorders. *J Gen Intern Med.* 2003;18(1): 53-56.
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3. Fairburn CG. Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q 6.0). In: Fairburn CG, editor. *Cognitive behaviour therapy and eating disorders.* New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2008.
4. Hay P, Chinn D, Forbes D, Madden S, Newton R, Sugden L, et al. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of eating disorders. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry.* 2014;48(11):977-1008.
5. Fairburn CG. Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-Q 6.0). In: Fairburn CG, editor. *Cognitive behaviour therapy and eating disorders.* New York, NY: Guilford Press; 2008.

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