

Navigating summer when you have an eating disorder

Looking after your body
and navigating social events



Summer can present a range of challenges for those affected by disordered eating and body image, such as:

Getting enough fluids and maintaining a meal plan

Trying to plan how to dress comfortably while also experiencing body image concerns

Encounters that might trigger body-comparison or body checking

Social summer activities that revolve around food, like picnics and barbecues

Social schedules become busier, disrupting routine

In this resource we'll explore these challenges and offer some tips that may help with navigating the season.

Staying fuelled & hydrated

Anxiety and stress can be made worse by not having enough water. Looking after yourself with the right amount of water, especially in the hot weather, can make a big difference for your body and mind.

Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of water (1.5-2L) in a day. During a heatwave, aim for 8-12 glasses (2-3L) if you can.

But also remember that drinking water is not a substitute for eating - we need both food and liquid to keep us healthy and well.



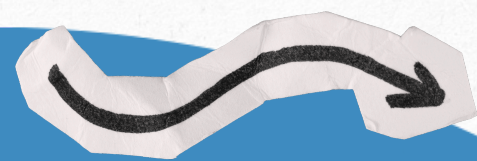
Dressing comfortably

For people who struggle with body image, having the option to throw on a baggy jumper can offer a safe choice that helps alleviate stress about perceived flaws.

As the days get hotter, that option isn't so easy.

But the prospect of having to go out in shorts and vests can also be uncomfortable, or even distressing. The result might be more ED behaviours like body-checking.

Here are our tips



Dressing comfortably

Finding a summer wardrobe that feels safe and comfy can make navigating hot days and summer social events much easier. Here's our tips:

Lightweight, loose fitting clothing (like shirts, blouses, wide-leg trousers, dresses and skirts) can help you cover up on challenging days, and still stay cool.

You could also try outdoors/hiking clothing, which is often designed to keep you cool when it's hot, and warm when it's cold. Baselayers are usually made to be breathable, and to protect from sunburn too.

Bring a few different layers with you when you go out, to give yourself options

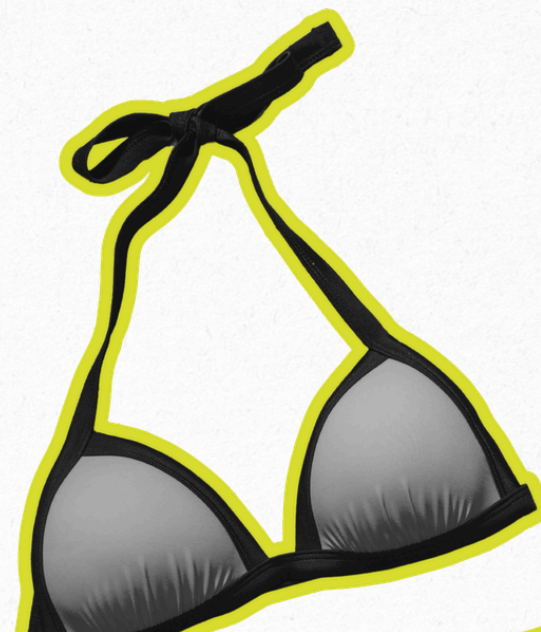


Social triggers around body image

As the weather gets warmer, people are dressing for hotter days and beach trips.

This might bring up more triggers for comparing your body to others. Or you might experience social pressures to dress in ways that make the critical ED-voice louder.

It can be really hard to get a break, when social media, TV, and magazines also go into a 'summer body' frenzy. Photo-editing and filters make extreme, unrealistic body standards look like the norm. It can be exhausting.



Social triggers around body image

Here are some things to try to manage your response to possible triggers around body image:

Write a list of alternative actions you can rely on when body image triggers come up – e.g. “instead of getting stuck looking in the mirror, I can take myself away from the mirror and get outside”

On social media, use the ‘I don’t want to see this’ tool on images promoting unrealistic body standards, to reduce their appearance on your feed

Use a journal to keep a list of the things your body has allowed you to experience across the summer; or make a note of the moments you have felt grateful for your work on your recovery this summer



Food-based social events

Sunnier days mean more 'spur of the moment' social occasions centred around food, like picnics and barbecues, which can present multiple challenges:

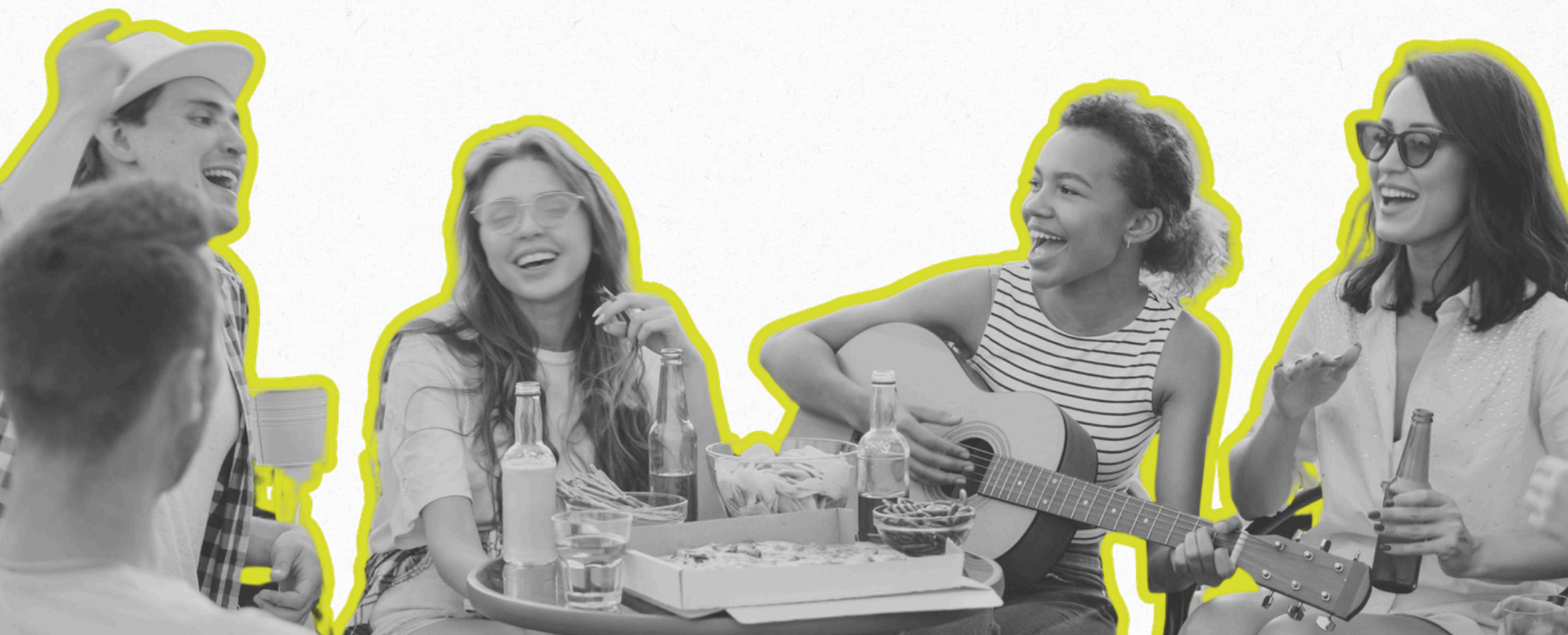
Eating in front of people - worrying about being watched

Spontaneous events might clash with meal plans

Feeling under pressure to eat foods that feel scary

Worrying about eating too much, or losing control

People might talk about diets or body image while eating



BIG social events

Summer also means more 'big' social events - like parties, weddings, and proms. These can involve months of build up and anticipation, mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety.

Huge emphasis is often placed on dressing up for the occasion which might bring up body image concerns.

On the day, worries might include those on the previous page, such as the pressure to eat a lot of food, or eat fear foods. Added to this is that weddings and proms can be a really big deal, and very emotional occasions - which might feel like a lot of pressure to get things 'perfect'.



However...

This is not to say that summer is all-around a hard time, or that social events are to be avoided!

Summer brings brighter, longer days; more time in nature; more opportunities to get outside and try new things. Opportunities to thank our bodies for all the amazing things they can do for us.

Social events are vital opportunities to feel connected to loved ones. To engage with life.

For many, that's what recovery is all about.



Our tips for summer socialising

Here are some things to try when you're worried about the social pressures summer brings:

If you have a big event coming up, speak to your therapist about how you feel about it and create a plan together for how you will navigate triggers

Ask a trusted friend to act as a supporter at social events - they could help you with portion sizes, or offer a distraction during meals

Encourage friends and family to plan time together that doesn't revolve around food or body image - games in the park, gardening, video games, camping, live music, tourist attractions, craft activities - you name it!

Remember it's okay to say no to an invitation if you need a break from socialising