

# Going to University with an eating disorder



## A SWEDA Resource

Starting university is a unique experience. It can be exciting but also daunting. Moving to a new area, making new lifelong friends, and gaining independence can be a valuable experience. For a young person with an eating disorder, university can be an emotionally complex time and can come with additional challenges. This guide provides advice and pointers for getting ready to move to University when you are living with an eating disorder.



# Things to consider before going to Uni

## Be honest with yourself

Consider how the demands of university might impact your eating disorder recovery. It's perfectly okay if you feel you need more time to prepare. Some universities might defer your place until you are ready.

## Look into available support

Consider what support you already have, such as therapy from your GP, local Community Mental Health Team (CMHT), or privately. When you move, they can help you find out what support might be available from the NHS. There may also be voluntary organisations offering support in the area: check on the REDCAN website.

## Look into your University's student support

Universities often have counselling services and student welfare/support organizations. Check the University's website, especially the Students' Union pages, for information on student support. Some university websites specifically mention their support for students with eating disorders.

## Focus on recovery

If you need to take time out to recover, that's okay. It's important to prioritise your health.



# When you arrive at Uni

## Develop your support network

When you move to University, you will need to establish a new support network – which may include reaching out to the University’s student welfare services or attending student welfare events. In the first few months, you might feel like you have less support than before, so think about how you can continue to use your existing support network during this transition. Although it may feel like it, you are not alone at university and admitting you need support is a positive step and not a weakness.

### Here are some steps you could take to develop your support network:

**(1) Visit your GP:** If you haven’t already registered with a local GP or your university’s medical centre, start here. When you register, let them know about your concerns. They can refer you to counselling or a specialist treatment centre if needed. There are NHS outpatient, inpatient, and day patient eating disorder clinics across the UK.

**(2) Contact your University’s Disability Advisor:** Even if you don’t view your eating disorder as a disability, email or arrange a meeting with your university’s Disability Advisor. This is the first step to finding out what help and support is available. You can contact the Disability Advisor before you move to university. Some students do this before deciding which university to attend to see which one can support them best. All correspondence with a Disability Advisor is confidential, and university offers cannot be taken back just because you seek support.

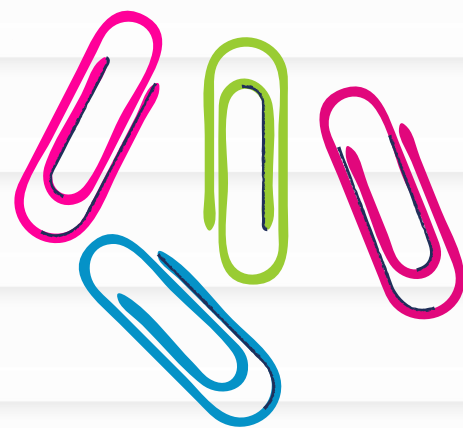
**(3) University Counsellors:** Most universities offer free counselling services that are separate from the NHS. You can refer yourself, or your tutors might refer you. You can use these services alongside NHS support. Many universities also have Nightline services during term time.

**(4) Local charities:** Look for local charities like SWEDA who provide support in specific regions of the UK. If you’re elsewhere, find local eating disorder charities that might offer support.

**(5) Other organisations:** **Beat** is a national charity that helps young people with eating disorders. They offer helplines, message boards, online forums, live chats, and in-person support groups. Beat also runs Helpfinder, an online directory of eating disorder services. **Student Minds** is the UK’s student mental health charity. They have student groups on campuses across the UK that provide support and work to improve student mental health.

**(6) Personal Tutor:** At university, you will have a Personal Tutor or Pastoral Tutor who helps with both academic and personal wellbeing. They can be a valuable resource if you feel comfortable sharing your difficulties with them. Personal Tutors can offer support for academic concerns related to your eating disorder and general assistance with your needs.

# Settling in



## **Finding friends you can trust**

As you settle in over your first year, make a few friends at university who you trust and feel safe with. Share your experiences with them if you feel comfortable. Good friends can provide important support.

## **Explore new opportunities**

University is a great place to try new things and have new experiences. Joining clubs or trying new activities can give you motivation and help with your recovery. Create a balance between studying and enrichment that supports you.





## Will seeking professional support affect my career prospects?

GPs keep confidential records, and you have the right to access them. For some jobs, a health check might be required. Certain careers, like healthcare or psychology, may need you to be in recovery for a number of years (possibly 2-5 years). Check the requirements for your chosen career.


If you're studying in certain fields, you might feel cautious about seeking NHS help, but it's important not to delay getting support. Some people choose private therapy, although it can be costly, or use university counsellors. These records are usually confidential, but always check your therapist's confidentiality policies. University counsellors may also be bound to university policies as well as their own.

## What if I feel unable to carry on with my studies?

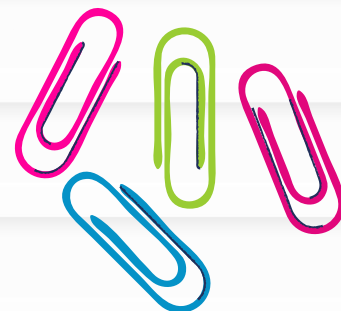
**(1) Use your support network:** At times like this you may need to draw on all the support mechanisms that you have in place. Talking to your tutors and course coordinator can be very helpful. Your university will likely try hard to provide the pastoral support you need.

**(2) Consider your options:** You could take a gap year, defer your place, or ask to take a break to focus on your recovery and return to your studies later.

**(3) Talk to your tutors about academic support too:** If you choose to continue your studies, your tutors might arrange extra help and support for you, like extensions for assignments. Discuss your needs to find out what is possible.



# Further support



## Websites

**SWEDA**

[www.swedauk.org](http://www.swedauk.org)

**National Union of Students**

[www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk)

**Student Minds**

[www.studentminds.org.uk](http://www.studentminds.org.uk)

**BEAT**

[www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

## Helplines

**SWEDA Mindline: 0300 330 5464**

A dedicated eating disorders helpline for people in Somerset.

Lines are open on Tuesdays 8pm - 11pm and Sundays 11am - 2pm.

**BEAT Helpline: 0808 801 0677**

ED support, available by phone, email, webchat, social media accounts and by letter.

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 3pm - 8pm.

**Mind Helpline: 0300 102 1234**

A safe space for you to talk about your mental health.

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 9am - 6pm

**Papyrus: 0800 068 4141**

A confidential support and advice service for children and young people under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide, or anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide.

Lines are open 24/7, 365 days a year.