Beat Calls for Restrictions on Laxative Sales

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Beat – the UK's leading eating disorder charity has become increasingly concerned at the numbers of people admitting that they have been able to obtain unregulated amounts of laxatives in a bid to restrict their body weight - often taking dangerously large quantities that may lead to long term health consequences.

In the past Beat has called for tighter regulations on the sale of laxatives and still they remain readily available across the counter and over the internet with no restrictions on the numbers sold. Over the past five years Beat has carried out two surveys which cumulatively had 800 respondents. Over 80% of those admitted to taking dangerous amounts of laxatives during their struggle with an eating disorder and use of them seems to be growing. Currently the sale of laxatives is unregulated and they can be bought by any person of any age in whichever quantities they want from supermarkets, pharmacies and online retailers.

"We welcome BBC Watchdog's investigation and call upon the regulatory authorities to introduce restrictions in supermarkets and retailers to reduce the ease with which young people can buy laxatives in large quantities" said Beat's Chief Executive Susan Ringwood. "We would suggest a minimum purchase age of 16 and a maximum pack size of ten tablets".

Lottie Hall is 17 and she started taking stimulant laxatives to help her lose weight when she was just 13 years old. She now suffers long term damage from laxative abuse. "At first it would start with just a few. Over time my body just got used to it and I found that I had to have more and more to have the desired effect. It was about three years before my parents found out and I started getting help."

Beat's call to action

In much the same way as painkillers became regulated in 2009 to protect vulnerable people Beat would like to see similar changes introduced for the way laxatives are sold.

Specifically we'd like to see:

Minimum purchase age of 16

Maximum pack size (we suggest blister packs of no more than 10)

Sales restricted to pharmacies and not sold in general retail outlets

Packs not displayed in self service areas but kept behind the sales counter

Warning labels on the packs which inform people that "This is not a weight loss product"

Further information: Beat Press Office 0300 123 7061 media@b-eat.co.uk

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Notes for editors

About Beat

Beat is the UK's leading charity supporting anyone affected by eating disorders or difficulties with food, weight and shape.

We provide information and support through Helplines which people can call, text or email; a UK wide network of self help and support groups; online support including information, message boards and online support groups and HelpFinder, an online directory of support services.

We provide expert training, resources and consultancy to health and social care professionals and schools and support and encourage research into eating disorders.

Beat is currently celebrating its 25th anniversary. Since 1989 we have been committed to supporting those affected by eating disorders and working towards

our vision: eating disorders will be beaten.

About eating disorders

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses and include anorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorder.

Over 1.6 million men and women of all ages and backgrounds in the UK are affected by eating disorders.

Eating disorders claim more lives than any other mental illness – one in five of the most seriously affected will die prematurely from the physical consequences or suicide.

Eating disorders are complex and there is no one single cause why someone develops an eating disorder. A whole range of different factors combine such as genetic, psychological, environmental, social and biological influences.

Although serious, eating disorders are treatable conditions and full recovery is possible. The sooner someone gets the treatment they need, the more likely they are to make a full recovery.

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