The eating disorders are a cause of substantial physical and psychosocial morbidity among adolescent girls and young adult women. They are less common among men. They typically begin in adolescence and may run a chronic course. Their effect is pervasive since they interfere with psychological, physical and social functioning. Once established, they are difficult to treat and impose a significant burden on health services. Three core eating disorders are recognised; anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder, together with a residual, but common, diagnostic category for mixed states. The aetiology of the eating disorders is complex and ill-understood. There is a genetic predisposition, and certain specific environmental risk factors have been implicated. Cognitive behavioural processes appear to play a major role in maintaining the disorders once they have developed. Evidence-based treatment is possible in most cases. The leading treatment for adolescents is a specific form of family therapy. A transdiagnostic form of cognitive behaviour therapy is the leading treatment for adults.

About the Speaker
Professor Christopher G Fairburn is Wellcome Principal Research Fellow and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Oxford. He directs the well-known Centre for Research on Eating Disorders at Oxford (CREDO; credo-oxford.com). He has two main research interests: the nature and treatment of the eating disorders, and the development, evaluation and dissemination of psychological treatments. He has an international reputation in both fields.