

Binge Eating Disorder



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What is binge eating disorder?

Binge eating disorder is a psychological condition characterized by frequent eating binges. To binge is to eat a large amount of food in a short period of time, generally in less than two hours. During a binge a person feels that their eating is out of control. Afterward they feel guilty, anxious, and/or depressed. People with binge eating disorder do not purge after a binge, as do people who suffer from bulimia nervosa. It is important to note that eating large amounts of food does not necessarily mean that a person has binge eating disorder.

Who suffers from binge eating disorder?

Binge eating disorder affects about 2 percent of adults in the United States. It can affect people from any age or ethnic group. Binge eating disorder appears to affect men and women equally. Commonly, obese people with binge eating disorder were overweight as children. People with binge eating disorder often have problems with yo-yo dieting, or losing weight and then regaining weight. Almost 50 percent of people in weight loss programs may have binge eating disorder.

What causes binge eating disorder?

It is not known what causes binge eating disorder. It is estimated that up to 50 percent of people with binge eating disorder also have problems with depression. It is unclear if depression is a cause of, an effect of, or is unrelated to binge eating disorder. Many people state that stress,

boredom, loneliness, anger, or sadness may trigger a binge eating episode.

Dieting can increase the risk of developing a binge eating problem. Some research suggests that 50 percent of people with binge eating disorder had the disorder prior to beginning to diet; however, strict dieting can worsen binge eating disorder.

Researchers are currently investigating the role of brain chemicals and how the way the body burns calories (metabolism) affects binge eating disorder.

Why is it important to seek treatment for binge eating disorder?

Many people with binge eating disorder never seek treatment, but the problem rarely goes away by itself. If left untreated, people with binge eating disorder can become severely overweight or obese. The main health problems associated with binge eating are problems that go along with obesity. These health problems include diabetes, heart problems, high cholesterol, gallbladder problems, high blood pressure, and certain types of chronic pain problems. Binge eating can also be associated with other mental health problems, including depression.

Should people with binge eating disorder try to diet?

People of normal or slightly above normal weight should not diet. This can sometimes make binge eating worse. Some people with binge eating disorder become severely overweight and may experience medical problems related to

weight. For these people, weight loss is an important treatment goal. It is important to discuss diet plans with a nutritionist and your primary care doctor before starting any diet.

Does treatment really work?

Yes. Many people with binge eating disorder can be treated successfully by psychologists, social workers, family therapists, and psychiatrists with experience in eating disorders. In many instances a team is involved in treatment, including physicians, dietitians, and case managers. While a medical evaluation is recommended, most treatments for binge eating disorder do not require a hospital stay. But treatments do not work instantly. They can be difficult and require hard work from the patient and their family.

Treatment for binge eating may include a combination of individual and/or group psychotherapy, behavioral weight programs, nutritional counseling, medications, exercise, and family education. Psychotherapy (namely cognitive-behavioral therapy) has been shown to improve self-control and decrease the behaviors that lead to bingeing. Family or couples therapy may be a part of the treatment plan. Therapists can guide family members in understanding binge eating disorder and learning new techniques for coping with problems. The sooner treatment starts, the better. As with most problems, the treatment is most successful if the problem is recognized early.

What can you do if you have binge eating disorder?

Recognizing that you have a problem is the first step to getting better.

- Seek professional help. Talk with your physician or behavioral medicine specialist.

- Set attainable goals. Remember to be proud of every success, no matter how small.
- Be patient. Setbacks are part of recovery.
- Don't let the scale run your life. The numbers on the scale don't reflect your self-worth.

Recommended Reading

Overcoming Binge Eating, C. Fairburn, Guilford Press. ISBN: 0898621798

Self-Esteem: Tools for Recovery, L. Hall and L. Cohen, Gurze Designs. ISBN: 0936077085

Surviving an Eating Disorder: Strategies for Family and Friends, M. Siegel and J. Brisman, Harper-Collins. ISBN: 0060952334.

For Women and Girls

Breaking Free from Compulsive Eating, G. Roth, Plume. ISBN: 0452270847

For Men and Boys

Making Weight: Healing Men's Conflicts with Food, Weight, and Shape, A. Anderson, L. Cohn, T. Holbrook and T.M. Holbrook, Gurze Designs. ISBN: 0936077352.

Recommended Web sites

Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. (ANRED)

anred.com

Eating Disorder Referral and Information Center
edreferral.com

Mental Help Net
mentalhelpnet.com

Something Fishy
something-fishy.org

When to call Kaiser Permanente

Call your doctor if you recognize any of these warning signs of binge eating disorder:

- using body weight as a primary measure of self-worth
- having an extreme dissatisfaction with your body image
- eating large amounts of food when you are not physically hungry
- eating until uncomfortably full
- feeling guilty or depressed after eating
- preferring to eat alone
- withdrawing from family and friends.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at members.kp.org. Here you'll find the Health Encyclopedia, which offers more in-depth information on this and many other topics.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.