

WHAT IS BINGE EATING DISORDER?

Binge eating disorder (BED) is characterised by periods of binge eating or overeating. The person affected by binge eating disorder may diet frequently, however they will not engage in purging behaviour (getting rid of food) after a binge. Over time this can, but may not always, result in significant weight gain.

Binges almost always occur in secret, and an appearance of 'normal' eating is often maintained in front of others. The food that is eaten is usually filling and high in calories. It tends to be food that people regard as fattening, and which they are attempting to exclude from their diet. The food is usually consumed very quickly, and is seldom tasted or enjoyed.

While in binge eating disorder there is no purging, there may be sporadic fasts or repetitive diets, and often feelings of shame or self-hatred surface after a binge.

A person affected by binge eating disorder may find themselves trapped in a cycle of dieting, bingeing, self-recrimination and self-loathing. They can feel particularly isolated which can contribute to the prolonging of their experience.

Binge eating disorder is almost as common among men as it is among women, and is thought to be more common than other eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

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*We are a voice, a listening ear,
a support for those affected by
eating disorders and their families.*

SERVICES

- Email Support Service
- 24 Hour Helpline Support
- Drop-in Service
- 1-1 Support
- Monthly Support Groups
- Early Intervention/Prevention Programmes for Schools and Youth Groups
- Workshops for Professionals

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Binge Eating Disorder



MAIN FEATURES

Behaviours may include

- Out-of-control eating
- Eating more than the body needs at any one time
- Eating much more quickly than usual during bingeing episodes
- Eating until uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts of food, even when not hungry
- Eating alone (often due to embarrassment at amount of food being eaten)

Emotional and psychological symptoms may include

- Feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Depression and related symptoms
- Low self esteem
- Dissatisfaction with body image
- Feeling out of control
- Anxiety

Physical symptoms may include

- Significant weight gain
- Digestive problems
- Joint and muscular pain
- Breathlessness
- Poor skin condition

Binge eating disorder is a serious mental health condition.

Obesity is a weight classification – a symptom – which **may** occur as a result of binge eating disorder.

While many of the health consequences associated with binge eating disorder are directly related to obesity, it is important to maintain a distinction between this symptom and the disorder itself.

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Binge eating disorder has a significant impact on the physical, as well as the emotional, health of the person affected.

Health consequences may include

- Digestive problems such as bloating, stomach cramps, constipation or diarrhoea
- Malnutrition because of the quality of foods consumed (high in fats and sugars, but lacking in vitamins in minerals)
- Where significant weight gain occurs, related health consequences may include:
 - High blood pressure
 - High cholesterol levels
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Gallbladder disease

Most physical symptoms can be reversed with weight loss and normalisation of a balanced diet and eating habits.

GETTING HELP

People often try to control BED on their own, and if they fail they may feel demoralised and depressed. This may lead to further episodes, and consequent feelings of social isolation, missing work, school, etc.

More often than not, people who experience BED will need the help and support of a health care professional.

- Consultation with a General Practitioner is an important first step towards self-care. The GP will look at the physical effects of binge eating and, if necessary, can make a referral to a dietician or to a psychologist or a therapist.
- Individual psychotherapy and family therapy can be useful in addressing the psychological and emotional issues that may be underlying the disorder.
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) teaches people to look at their unhealthy patterns of behaviour and how to change them.

For change to occur and to be lasting, a recovery approach which tackles both the physical and psychological aspects of the disorder will be required.

RECOVERY

A person with binge eating disorder may put off seeking help and support because they are frightened of the reaction they might get if they disclose what they are doing. Shame and the fear of rejection become powerful barriers to change. Being able to come out of isolation may take time.

Support groups can be very useful in reducing feelings of isolation and in providing encouragement through some of the more difficult parts of recovery.

Recovery can only begin when a person is ready to change. Identifying and breaking the cycle of dieting and binge eating is an important part of this process.

Change can be made easier for a person if those around them inform themselves about binge eating disorder and about how they can offer support and show understanding.

Most people will experience some periods of relapse and these need to be recognised as part of recovery and not as a failure. Learning to cope with relapse can actually increase the chances of long term recovery.

