



Binge Eating Disorder

<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Q: What is binge eating disorder?

A: People with binge eating disorder often eat an unusually large amount of food and feel out of control during the binges. Unlike bulimia or anorexia, binge eaters do not throw up their food, exercise a lot, or eat only small amounts of only certain foods. Because of this, binge eaters are often overweight or obese. People with binge eating disorder also may:

- Eat more quickly than usual during binge episodes
- Eat until they are uncomfortably full
- Eat when they are not hungry
- Eat alone because of embarrassment
- Feel disgusted, depressed, or guilty after overeating

About 2 percent of all adults in the United States (as many as 4 million Americans) have binge eating disorder. Binge eating disorder affects women slightly more often than men.

Q: What causes binge eating disorder?

A: Researchers are unsure of the causes and nature of binge eating and other eating disorders. Eating disorders likely involve abnormal activity in several different areas of the brain. Researchers are looking at the following factors that may affect binge eating:

- **Depression.** As many as half of all people with binge eating disorder are

depressed or have been depressed in the past.

- **Dieting.** Some people binge after skipping meals, not eating enough food each day, or avoiding certain kinds of food.
- **Coping skills.** Studies suggest that people with binge eating may have trouble handling some of their emotions. Many people who are binge eaters say that being angry, sad, bored, worried, or stressed can cause them to binge eat.
- **Biology.** Researchers are looking into how brain chemicals and metabolism (the way the body uses calories) affect binge eating disorder. Research also suggests that genes may be involved in binge eating, since the disorder often occurs in several members of the same family. Neuroimaging, or pictures of the brain, may also lead to a better understanding of binge eating disorder.

Certain behaviors and emotional problems are more common in people with binge eating disorder. These include abusing alcohol, acting quickly without thinking (impulsive behavior), not feeling in charge of themselves, and not feeling a part of their communities.

Q: What are the health consequences of binge eating disorder?

A: People with binge eating disorder are usually very upset by their binge eating and may become depressed. Research has shown that people with binge eating disorder report more health problems, stress, trouble sleeping, and suicidal thoughts than people without an eating disorder. People with binge eating disorder often feel badly about themselves



<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

and may miss work, school, or social activities to binge eat.

People with binge eating disorder may gain weight. Weight gain can lead to obesity, and obesity raises the risk for these health problems:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Gallbladder disease
- Heart disease
- Certain types of cancer

Obese people with binge eating disorder often have other mental health conditions, including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Personality disorders

Is it safe for young people to take antidepressants for binge eating disorder?

It may be safe for young people to be treated with antidepressants. However, drug companies who make antidepressants are required to post a “black box” warning label on the medication. A “black box” warning is the most serious type of warning on prescription medicines.

It may be possible that antidepressants make children, adolescents, and young adults more likely to think about suicide or commit suicide.

The FDA offers the latest information, including which drugs are included in this warning and danger signs to look for, on their Web site at <http://www.fda.gov>.

Q: Can someone with binge eating disorder get better?

A: Yes. Someone with binge eating disorder can get better.

People with binge eating disorder should get help from a health care professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker. As with bulimia, there are different ways to treat binge eating disorder that may be helpful for some people.

- Nutritional advice and psychotherapy, especially cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Drug therapy, such as antidepressants like fluoxetine (Prozac) or appetite suppressants prescribed by a doctor

CBT is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the important role of thinking in how we feel and what we do. Therapy for a person with binge eating disorder may be one-on-one with a therapist or group-based. ■



<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

For more information

For more information on binge eating disorder, please call womenshealth.gov at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

National Mental Health Information Center, CMHS, SAMHSA, HHS

Phone: (800) 789-2647

Internet Address: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

American Psychological Association

Phone: (800) 374-2721

Internet Address: <http://www.apa.org>

Weight Control Information Network (WIN), NIDDK, NIH, HHS

Phone: (877) 946-4627

Internet Address: <http://win.niddk.nih.gov>

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

Phone: (800) 931-2237

Internet Address: <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

Academy for Eating Disorders (AED)

Phone: (847) 498-4274

Internet Address: <http://www.aedweb.org>

The Obesity Society

Phone: (301) 563-6526

Internet Address: <http://www.obesity.org>

All material contained in this FAQ is free of copyright restrictions, and may be copied, reproduced, or duplicated without permission of the Office on Women's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. Citation of the source is appreciated.

Content last updated June 15, 2009.