



WomensHealth.gov

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 888-220-5446

# Binge Eating Disorder

## 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. 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

## Q: What causes binge eating disorder?

**A:** No one knows for sure what causes binge eating disorder. 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.

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

## 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 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



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**Q: What is the treatment for binge eating disorder?**

**A:** People with binge eating disorder should get help from a health care provider, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker. There are several different ways to treat binge eating disorder:

- *Cognitive-behavioral therapy* teaches people how to keep track of their eating and change their unhealthy eating habits. It teaches them how to cope with stressful situations. It also helps them feel better about their body shape and weight.
- *Interpersonal psychotherapy* helps people look at their relationships with friends and family and make changes in problem areas.

- *Drug therapy*, such as antidepressants, may be helpful for some people.

Other treatments include dialectical behavior therapy, which helps people regulate their emotions; drug therapy with the anti-seizure medication topiramate; exercise in combination with cognitive-behavioral therapy; and support groups.

Many people with binge eating disorder also have a problem with obesity. There are treatments for obesity, like weight loss surgery (gastrointestinal surgery), but these treatments will not treat the underlying problem of binge eating disorder. ■



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## *For More Information*

For more information on binge eating disorder, contact the National Women's Health Information Center at 800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

**National Mental Health Information Center, CMHS, SAMHSA, HHS**

Phone: (800) 789-2647

Internet Address:

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/>

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

Phone: (877) 946-4627

Internet Address:

<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/index.htm>

**Academy for Eating Disorders (AED)**

Phone: (703) 556-9222

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

**American Obesity Association**

Phone: (800) 98-OBESE

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

**American Psychological Association**

Phone: (800) 374-2721

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

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

Phone: (541) 344-1144

Internet Address: <http://www.anred.com/>

**National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)**

Phone: (800) 931-2237

Internet Address:

[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

*This information was partly abstracted from a fact sheet prepared by the Weight Control Information Network, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK).*

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