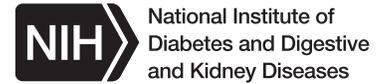


Binge Eating Disorder

U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services



WIN *Weight-control Information Network*

Binge eating means eating a large amount of food in a short period of time. Most of us may overeat during a special occasion, like a holiday. But people who have this disorder binge eat on a regular basis and feel a lack of control over their eating.

People with binge eating disorder are usually very upset by their binge eating and may experience stress, trouble sleeping, and depression. Binge eating disorder may lead to weight gain and to related health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Most people who binge eat feel ashamed and try to hide their problem. Often they become so good at hiding it that even close friends and family members may not know that their loved one binge eats.

Binge eating disorder can be successfully treated. If you are concerned that you or someone close to you may have binge eating disorder, talking to a health care provider may be an important first step. This fact sheet will tell you more about the disorder and how to get help.

How common is binge eating disorder?

Binge eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the United States.¹ Among adults, about 3.5 percent of women and 2 percent of men are estimated to have binge eating disorder. About 1.6 percent of adolescents may also be affected.²

Among women, binge eating disorder is most common in early adulthood, while among men it is most common in midlife. Binge eating disorder affects blacks as often as whites, but it is not known how often it affects people in other racial and ethnic groups.

People with obesity are at a higher risk for developing the disorder than people of normal weight. Although most people with obesity do not have binge eating disorder, about 2 in 3 people who have the disorder are obese.³ People of normal weight can also have binge eating disorder.

What is obesity?

Obesity is usually defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater. The BMI is a measure of your weight in relation to your height. For a link to an online tool that will calculate your BMI, see the Resources section at the end of this fact sheet.

How do I know if I have binge eating disorder?

Most of us overeat from time to time, and some of us often feel we have eaten more than we should have. Eating a lot of food does not necessarily mean that you have binge eating disorder.

People who have binge eating disorder⁴

- eat a large amount of food in a short period of time (for example, within 2 hours).
- feel a lack of control over their eating. For example, they may feel that they cannot stop eating or control what or how much they are eating.

People who have binge eating disorder may also

- eat much more quickly than usual
- eat until uncomfortably full
- eat large amounts of food even when not really hungry
- eat alone
- feel disgusted, depressed, or guilty after overeating

If you think that you or someone close to you may have binge eating disorder, share your concerns with a health care provider. He or she can connect you to helpful sources of care.

How is binge eating disorder different from bulimia nervosa?

People who have the eating disorder bulimia nervosa also binge eat on a regular basis. However, they try to make up for the binge eating by using unhealthy behaviors, such as vomiting, using laxatives or diuretics (water pills), fasting, and/or doing too much exercise.

What causes binge eating disorder?

No one knows for sure what causes binge eating disorder. Like other eating disorders, binge eating disorder may result from a mix of genetic, psychological, emotional, social, and other factors. Binge eating disorder has been linked to depression and anxiety. Painful childhood experiences—such as family problems and critical comments about shape, weight, or eating—may also make some people more likely to develop the disorder.

Although binge eating is related to dieting, it is not clear if dieting causes binge eating disorder. Among some people, trying to diet in unhealthy ways—such as by skipping meals, not eating enough food each day, or avoiding certain kinds

of food—may lead to binge eating. Studies suggest that changes to eating habits that are made as part of obesity treatment are not harmful to people with binge eating disorder and may promote weight loss.

What are the health risks of binge eating disorder?

People with binge eating disorder are usually very upset by their binge eating and may become depressed. They may also miss school, social activities, or work to binge eat.

Research suggests that people with binge eating disorder report more health problems, stress, trouble sleeping, and suicidal thoughts than do people without an eating disorder. Other problems that may result from binge eating disorder could include digestive problems, headaches, joint pains, menstrual problems, and muscle pains. In addition, binge eating disorder may lead to weight gain and to health problems related to obesity.

Should people with binge eating disorder try to lose weight?

Many people with binge eating disorder have excess weight and related health problems. Losing weight may help prevent or reduce some of these problems. However, binge eating may make it difficult to lose weight and keep it off.

People with binge eating disorder who are obese may benefit from a weight-loss program that also offers treatment for eating disorders. However, some people with binge eating disorder may do just as well in a standard weight-loss program as people who do not binge eat.

How is binge eating disorder treated?

People with binge eating disorder should get help from a specialist in eating disorders, such as a psychiatrist or a psychologist. Treatment may include the use of behavior change therapy, counseling on eating patterns, and/or drugs. The

What health risks are linked to excess weight?

Excess weight may increase the risk for many health problems, including

- type 2 diabetes
- high blood pressure
- heart disease and strokes
- certain types of cancer
- sleep apnea (pauses in breathing during sleep)
- osteoarthritis (a disease where the joints wear down, causing stiffness and pain)
- fatty liver disease
- kidney disease
- irregular periods and infertility in women
- pregnancy problems, such as high blood sugar during pregnancy, high blood pressure, and increased risk for cesarean delivery (C-section)



goal is to change the thoughts and beliefs that lead to binge eating and promote healthy eating and physical activity habits.

In addition to treatment from specialists, self-help books and DVDs have been found to help some people control their binge eating. Support groups may also be a good source of encouragement, hope, and advice on coping with the disorder.

If you have any symptoms of binge eating disorder, talk to your health care provider about the type of help that may be best for you. Ask for a referral to a specialist or a support group in your area.

The good news is that most people do well in treatment and can overcome binge eating.

References

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3. Uher R, Rutter M. Classification of feeding and eating disorders: review of evidence and proposals for ICD-11. *World Psychiatry*. 2012;11(2):80-92.
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Research

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) conducts and supports a broad range of basic and clinical obesity research. More information about obesity research is available at <http://www.obesityresearch.nih.gov>.

Clinical trials are research studies involving people. Clinical trials look at safe and effective new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease. Researchers also use clinical trials to look at other aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses. To learn more about clinical trials, why they matter, and how to participate, visit the NIH Clinical Research Trials and You website at <http://www.nih.gov/health/clinicaltrials>. For information about current studies, visit <http://www.ClinicalTrials.gov>.

Resources

Additional Reading from the Weight-control Information Network

The following publications are available online at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications> and also by calling WIN toll-free at 1-877-946-4627:

- **Better Health and You: Tips for Adults** helps adults plan steps toward eating healthier and being more physically active. This brochure also explains the benefits of getting healthy and the harmful effects of being overweight.
- **Do You Know Some of the Health Risks of Being Overweight?** explains the harmful effects of being overweight and the benefits of losing weight.

Additional Resources

- **Academy for Eating Disorders**
<http://www.aedweb.org>
- **American Psychiatric Association**
<http://www.psych.org>
- **American Psychological Association**
<http://www.apa.org>
- **BMI Calculator**
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/BMI/bmicalc.htm>
- **National Eating Disorder Association**
<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>
- **National Institute of Mental Health**
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

Inclusion of resources is for information only and does not imply endorsement by NIDDK or WIN.

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). WIN provides the general public, health professionals, and the media with science-based, up-to-date, culturally relevant materials and tips. Topics include healthy eating, barriers to physical activity, portion control, and eating and physical activity myths. Publications produced by WIN are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

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This brochure is also available at <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>.

You may also find additional information about this topic by visiting MedlinePlus at <http://www.medlineplus.gov>.

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