

Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

What is Binge Eating Disorder?

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR), which is used to diagnose illnesses of a psychological nature, BED includes:

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating, where an episode of binge eating is characterised by both:
 1. Eating, in a discrete period of time (e.g. within any 2-hour period), an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat in a similar period of time under similar circumstances.
 2. A sense of lack of control over eating during the episode (e.g. a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how much one is eating).
- The binge eating episodes are associated with three (or more) of the following:
 1. Eating much more rapidly than normal.
 2. Eating until feeling uncomfortably full.
 3. Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry.
 4. Eating alone because of being embarrassed by how much one is eating.
 5. Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty after overeating
- Marked distress regarding binge eating is present.
- The binge eating occurs, on average, at least 2 days a week for 6 months.
- The binge eating is not associated with the regular use of inappropriate compensatory behaviours (e.g. purging, fasting, excessive exercise) and does not occur exclusively during the course of Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa.

Main characteristics of Binge Eating Disorder:

- Psychological disorder and distress
- Regular binges (overeating) without being sick afterwards
- Nearly always overweight
- Unlikely to starve or take laxatives
- Obesity can cause high blood pressure and diabetes
- General aches and pains through carrying extra weight
- Obesity can lead to immobility

What is a Binge?

The foods eaten are generally high in calories, carbohydrates and fat. In some circumstances, sufferers may resort to eating things like uncooked pasta, partially defrosted frozen food or condiments, or retrieve and eat previously discarded food. As they start to feel full they feel guilty and shameful. It is not uncommon for people to eat two, three or even four times a normal amount of food in one go. Then they vomit or take laxatives to purge themselves of everything they have consumed. At this point, some people describe

feeling emotionally relieved and physically light-headed. They believe this behaviour keeps emotional pain and unhappiness under control - but this only works for a brief time before the cycle starts again.

Signs of Binge Eating:

- Eating much more rapidly than usual
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts of food when not physically hungry
- Eating alone because of embarrassment at the quantities of food consumed
- Feeling out of control around food
- Feeling very self-conscious eating in front of others
- Feeling ashamed, depressed or guilty after bingeing
- Being unable to purge yourself or compensate for the food eaten

What age range does this ED affect?

- BED can affect any age, although usually occurs in adults

Does Binge Eating Disorder affect both men and women?

- Nearly half of all sufferers are men

How Binge Eating Disorder sufferers may feel about themselves:

- Low self-esteem
- Self-loathing
- Out of control
- May outwardly express desire to lose weight, but inwardly feels insecure about doing so

Common character traits among those with a Binge Eating Disorder:

- Self-conscious and ashamed to eat in front of others
- Difficulty with impulse control
- Kind and shy
- Creative
- Often teased about being overweight
- Difficulty expressing emotions

Possible reasons why someone might develop Binge Eating Disorder:

- Genetics – researchers have found a genetic mutation that might cause food addiction
- Low levels of serotonin (the 'happy hormone') in the brain
- Social pressure to be thin
- Learnt behaviour from childhood
- Criticism about appearance and body weight
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional distress such as depression, low self-esteem and loneliness
- Many describe BED as feeding an emotional hole – comfort eating
- Food is used as a way to escape from underlying problems
- Avoidance of dealing with underlying problems

Effects of Binge Eating Disorder:

Physical:

- Overweight or obesity
 - Anxiety and panic attacks
 - Problems with blood pressure and heart disease due to carrying excess weight
 - Can lead to immobility
- ### Psychological:
- Obsessive worrying
 - Mood swings
 - Paranoid thinking
 - Feeling humiliated and that they are not good enough for anything or anyone
- ### Behavioural:
- Depression
 - Social isolation
 - Struggle to make friends and socialise
 - Struggle to maintain relationships

What can make the situation worse?

- The situation can be exacerbated when others condemn their behaviour
- This can lead sufferers to feel even more need to gain control through food
- This also confirms their self-persecutory thoughts that they are worthless

Treatment for Binge Eating Disorder:

- **One-to-One Therapy - CBT, Interpersonal Psychotherapy, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy:** This can teach sufferers how to fight the compulsion to binge, exchange unhealthy habits for healthy ones, monitor eating and mood, and develop effective stress-management skills
- **Group Therapy/Support Groups:** Overeaters Anonymous and Rebalance
- **Education:** Learning about the dangers of BED, as well as how to eat right, make balanced meal plans and choose healthy food when eating out
- **Medication:** Anti-depressants for low mood and appetite suppressants can be used to reduce the number of binge eating episodes.