

### Bulimia Nervosa (BN)

#### What is Bulimia Nervosa?

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

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating 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 during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances.
  2. A sense of lack of control over eating during the episode (such as a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how much one is eating).
- Recurrent inappropriate compensatory behaviour to prevent weight gain, such as self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications, fasting, or excessive exercise.
- The binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behaviour both occur, on average, at least twice a week for 3 months (NB: If you meet the above criteria but have been bingeing and purging for less than twice a week for 3 months, you might have Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified).
- Self-evaluation is unduly influenced by body shape and weight.
- The disturbance does not occur exclusively during episodes of Anorexia Nervosa.

#### Types of Bulimia Nervosa:

The DSM further categorises BN into two types:

- **Purging Type:** During the current episode of BN, the person has regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives or diuretics.
- **Non-Purging Type:** During the current episode of BN, the person has used other inappropriate compensatory behaviour but has not regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or misused laxatives or diuretics.

#### Main characteristics of Bulimia Nervosa:

- Psychological disorder and distress
- Regular bingeing and purging of food – usually between 1,500 – 3,000 calories a time
- Eating in a secret, hurried, shameful way
- Rigorous dieting and exercise between binges
- Often consume large amounts of laxatives
- Usually normal or above normal body weight for age/height
- Swelling of salivary glands causing a puffy appearance to face
- Episodes of depression

- Sleep disorders and nightmares are common
- Can effect blood pressure, causing dizziness and fainting
- Erosion of tooth enamel, caused by stomach acids
- Self-induced vomiting can rupture stomach, which can lead to death

#### **What age range does this ED affect?**

- Most common in people between 17 and 26 years of age
- Can effect any age, although not usually before 13 years old

#### **Does Bulimia Nervosa affect both men and women?**

- The majority of sufferers are women
- Approximately 10–15% are men

#### **How Bulimia Nervosa sufferers may feel about themselves:**

- Low self-esteem
- Self-loathing
- Out of control
- Fear of becoming fat
- Feelings of helplessness
- Excitable about bingeing but overwhelmed with guilt after purging
- Bulimia has been described as a way of filling an emotional hole

#### **Common character traits among those with Bulimia Nervosa:**

- Reward dependence and susceptible to peer pressure
- Sensitive, intuitive and empathetic to the needs of others
- Overly concerned with their image
- Novelty seekers with a low tolerance for boredom
- Impulsive character
- Hyper-vigilance in an effort to avoid harm, which can lead to excessive worrying and being overly cautious

#### **Possible reasons why someone might develop Bulimia Nervosa:**

- Many describe the disorder as filling an emotional hole
- Purging has been described as a way of secretly expressing pain or upset
- A form of self-punishment
- The result of childhood abuse
- A response to emotional stress
- Previous Anorexia Nervosa sufferers
- Addiction within the family

## Effects of Bulimia Nervosa:

### Physical:

- Lack of energy
- Sore throat and bad breath due to excess vomiting
- Increased risk of heart problems and problems with internal organs
- Irregular periods in females
- Poor skin condition and possible hair loss
- Swollen salivary glands and tooth decay
- Unlike Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa is not necessarily visible

### Psychological:

- Erratic mood swings and emotional behaviour
- Obsession with food or feeling out of control around food
- Distorted perception of body weight and shape – Body Dysmorphic Disorder
- Feelings of shame and guilt

### Behavioural:

- Obsessive concern with weight
- Disappearance into bathroom after eating
- Occasionally, shoplifting of food products connected to bulimia
- Secrecy
- Hoarding food

### 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 Bulimia Nervosa:

- **One-to-One Therapy - CBT, Interpersonal Psychotherapy, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy:** This can teach sufferers how to fight the compulsion to starve, binge, and purge, as well as exchange unhealthy habits for healthy ones, monitor eating and mood, and develop effective stress-management skills
- **Group Therapy/Support Groups:** Self-help diary/support groups such as Rebalance or family therapy
- **Education:** Learning about the dangers of BN, as well as how to eat right and make balanced meal plans
- **Medication:** Anti-depressants for low mood; Fluoxetine (Prozac) has been found to reduce binge/purge episodes in people with BN
- **Hospitalisation:** In extreme cases, in-patient treatment may be required.