

# Binge Eating Disorder



- Binge eating is when a person eats a large amount of food in a short amount of time and feels they can't control what or how much they eat. If a person binge eats at least once a week for 3 months, they may have binge eating disorder.
- Binge eating disorder may result from a mix of factors related to a person's genes, their thoughts and feelings, and social issues. Binge eating disorder has been linked to depression and anxiety.
- Binge eating disorder is often treated with psychotherapy. A psychiatrist or other health professional may also prescribe medication to treat the binge eating or other medical condition.

## What Is Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge eating is when a person eats a large amount of food in a short amount of time and feels that they can't control what or how much they eat. If a person binge eats regularly—at least once a week for 3 months—they may have binge eating disorder.

If a person has binge eating disorder, they may be very upset by their binge eating. They also may feel ashamed and try to hide their problem. Even their close friends and family members may not know they binge eat.

## How Is Binge Eating Disorder Different From Bulimia Nervosa?

People who have bulimia nervosa try to prevent weight gain after binge eating by vomiting, using laxatives or diuretics, fasting, or exercising too much. Individuals with binge eating disorder do not attempt to prevent weight gain.

## How Common Is Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge eating disorder is the most common eating disorder in the United States. About 3.5 percent of adult women and 2 percent of adult men have binge eating disorder. For men, binge eating disorder is most common in midlife, between the ages of 45 to 59.

For women, binge eating disorder most commonly starts in early adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 29. About 1.6 percent of teenagers are affected. A much larger number of adults and children have episodes of binge eating or loss-of-control eating, but the episodes do not occur frequently enough to meet the criteria for binge eating disorder.

Binge eating disorder affects African Americans as often as whites. More research is needed on how often binge eating disorder affects people in other racial and ethnic groups.

## Who Is More Likely To Develop Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge eating disorder can occur in people of average body weight but is more common in people with obesity, particularly severe obesity. However, it is important to note that most people with obesity do not have binge eating disorder. Painful childhood

experiences—such as family problems and critical comments about a person's shape, weight, or eating—also are associated with developing binge eating disorder. Binge eating disorder also runs in families, and there may be a genetic component as well.

## What Other Health Problems Can A Person Have With Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge eating disorder may lead to weight gain and health problems related to obesity. Being overweight and obese are associated with many health problems, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. People with binge eating disorder may also have mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. Some people with binge eating disorder also have problems with their digestive system, or joint and muscle pain.



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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

## What Are The Symptoms Of Binge Eating Disorder?

A person who has binge eating disorder may:

- Eat a large amount of food in a short amount of time; for example, within two hours
- Feel they lack control over their eating, e.g., they cannot stop eating or control what or how much they are eating
- Eat more quickly than usual during binge episodes
- Eat until they feel uncomfortably full
- Eat large amounts of food even when they are not hungry
- Eat alone because they are embarrassed about the amount of food they eat
- Feel disgusted, depressed, or guilty after overeating

If an individual is concerned that someone close to them may have binge eating disorder, they can share their concerns with a health care provider. He or she can connect them to helpful resources.

## 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 factors related to a person's genes, their thoughts and feelings, and social issues. Binge eating disorder has been linked to depression and anxiety.

For some people, dieting in unhealthy ways—such as skipping meals, not eating enough food, or avoiding certain kinds of food—may contribute to binge eating.

## How Do Doctors Diagnose Binge Eating Disorder?

Most people overeat from time to time, and some often feel they have eaten more than they should have. Eating a lot of food does not necessarily mean a person has binge eating disorder.

To determine if a person has binge eating disorder, they may want to talk with a specialist in eating disorders, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other mental health professional. He or she will talk with the person about their symptoms and eating patterns. If a health care provider determines the person has binge eating disorder, he or she can work with them to find the best treatment options.

## What Is The Treatment For Binge Eating Disorder?

Treatment may include therapy to help the person change their eating habits, as well as thoughts and feelings that may lead to binge eating and other psychological symptoms. Types of therapy that have been shown to help people with binge eating disorder include cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, and dialectical behavior therapy. The psychiatrist or other health care provider may also prescribe medication to help the person with their binge eating or to treat other medical or mental health problems.

## Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental  
Health and Addiction Services  
[www.ct.gov/DMHAS](http://www.ct.gov/DMHAS)

United Way 211  
[www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org)  
2.1.1 or 1.800.203.1234

## National Resources

National Eating Disorders  
Association  
[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)  
1.800.931.2237

National Alliance on Mental  
Illness (NAMI)  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)  
1.800.950.NAMI (6264)

