# Binge Eating Disorder

Read about binge eating disorder, which is when a person feels compelled to overeat on a regular basis. Find out about the symptoms, treatments and possible causes.

* [Overview - Binge eating disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/binge-eating/overview/)
* [Treatment - Binge eating disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/binge-eating/treatment/)

**Overview – Binge eating disorder**

**Binge eating disorder involves regularly eating a lot of food over a short period of time until you're uncomfortably full.**

It's a serious mental health condition where people eat without feeling like they’re in control of what they’re doing.

Binges are sometimes planned in advance but can be spontaneous. They are usually done alone and may include "special" binge foods. You may feel guilty or ashamed after binge eating.

Men and women of any age can get binge eating disorder, but it often starts when people are in their 20s or older.

## **Symptoms of binge eating disorder**

The main symptom of binge eating disorder is eating a lot of food in a short time and not being able to stop when full. Other symptoms include:

* eating when not hungry
* eating very fast during a binge
* eating alone or secretly
* feeling depressed, guilty, ashamed or disgusted after binge eating

People who regularly eat in this way may have binge eating disorder.

### **Warning signs of binge eating disorder in someone else**

Someone you care about may have an eating disorder if they:

* change their behaviour or have changes in their mood
* eat a lot of food, very quickly
* try to hide how much they're eating
* store up supplies of food
* put on weight (but this does not happen to everyone with binge eating disorder)

## **Getting help for binge eating disorder**

If you think you may have binge eating disorder, see a GP as soon as you can. They'll ask you about your eating habits and how you're feeling and check your weight and overall health.

The GP should refer you to an eating disorder specialist or team of specialists if they think you have binge eating disorder or another eating disorder.

It can be hard to admit you need help with an eating disorder, so bringing a friend or loved one with you to your appointment may help.

You can also talk in confidence to an adviser from eating disorders charity [Beat](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/) by calling its adult helpline on 0808 801 0677 or youth helpline on 0808 801 0711.

### **Getting help for someone else**

If you're concerned that a family member or friend may have binge eating disorder, let them know you're worried about them and encourage them to see a GP. You could offer to go along with them.

Read more about [talking to your child about eating disorders](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/eating-disorders/advice-for-parents/) and [supporting someone with an eating disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/advice-for-life-situations-and-events/how-to-help-someone-with-eating-disorder/).

## **Treatment for binge eating**

Most people recover from binge eating disorder with the right support and treatment, but it may take time.

The main treatments are:

* guided self-help programmes
* a type of talking therapy called [cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview/), which is in group sessions or individual (1-on-1) sessions

[Read more about treating binge eating disorder](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/binge-eating/treatment/)

## **Causes of binge eating**

The exact causes of binge eating disorder are not known, but you are more likely to have an eating disorder if:

* you or a member of your family has a history of eating disorders, depression, or alcohol or drug misuse
* you're too worried about being slim, particularly if you also feel pressure from society or your job, for example, ballet dancers, models or athletes
* you have anxiety, low self-esteem, an obsessive personality or are a perfectionist
* you've experienced a stressful event or trauma

## **More in**[**Binge eating disorder**](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/binge-eating/)

# Treatment - Binge eating disorder

**Most people get better from binge eating disorder with treatment and support.**

## **Guided self-help**

You'll probably be offered a guided self-help programme as a first step in treating binge eating disorder. This often involves working through a self-help book or self-help guide online, combined with sessions with a healthcare professional, such as a therapist.

Joining a self-help support group, like one of the [Beat online support groups for people with binge eating disorder](https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/nightingale), may also be helpful.

If self-help treatment alone is not enough or has not helped you after 4 weeks, you may also be offered [cognitive behavioural therapy](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/cognitive-behavioural-therapy-cbt/overview/) or medicine.

## **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**

If you're offered CBT, it will usually be in group sessions with other people, but it may also be offered as 1-to-1 sessions with a therapist.

You should be offered about 20 sessions across 20 weeks, each one lasting about 90 minutes for a group session.

CBT involves talking to a therapist, who will help you explore patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that could be contributing to your eating disorder.

They will help you:

* plan out the meals and snacks you should have during the day, to help you adopt regular eating habits
* work out what is triggering your binge eating
* change and manage negative feelings about your body
* stick to your new eating habits so you do not relapse into binge eating

You should not try to diet while you're having treatment because this can make it more difficult to stop binge eating.

## **Medicine**

Antidepressants should not be offered as the only treatment for binge eating disorder. But you may be offered an antidepressant in combination with therapy or self-help treatment to help you manage other conditions, such as:

* anxiety or depression
* social phobia
* obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Antidepressants are rarely prescribed for children or young people under 18.

[Find out more about antidepressants](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/medicines-and-psychiatry/antidepressants/overview/)

## **More in**[**Binge eating disorder**](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/binge-eating/)

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