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Binge eating disorder

Binge eating disorder is an eating disorder in which a person regularly eats unusually large amounts of food. During binge eating, the person also feels a loss of control and is not able to stop eating.

Causes

The exact cause of binge eating disorder is unknown. Things that may lead to this disorder include:

- Genes, such as having close relatives who also have an eating disorder
- Changes in brain chemicals
- Depression or other emotions, such as feeling upset or stressed
- Unhealthy dieting, such as not eating enough nutritious food or skipping meals

In the United States, binge eating is the most common eating disorder. More women than men have it.

Symptoms

A person with binge eating disorder:

- Eats large amounts of food in a short period, for example, within 2 hours
- Is not able to control overeating, for example is unable to stop eating or control the amount of food
- Eats food very fast each time
- Keeps eating even when full (gorging) or until uncomfortably full
- Eats even though not hungry
- Eats alone (in secret)
- Feels guilty, disgusted, ashamed, or depressed after eating so much

Binge eating may occur on its own or with another eating disorder, such as bulimia. People with bulimia may eat large amounts of high-calorie foods, often in secret. After this binge eating, they often force themselves to vomit or take laxatives, or exercise vigorously.

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will perform a physical exam and ask about your eating patterns and symptoms.

Blood tests may be done.

Treatment

The overall goals of treatment are to help you:

- Lessen and then stop bingeing.
- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Get treated for any emotional problems, including overcoming feelings and managing situations that trigger binge eating.

Eating disorders, such as binge eating, are often treated with psychological and nutrition counseling.

Psychological counseling is also called talk therapy. It involves talking with a mental health provider, or therapist, who understands why people binge eat. The therapist helps you recognize the feelings and thoughts that cause you to binge eat. Then they teach you how to change these into helpful thoughts and healthy actions.

Nutrition counseling is also important for recovery. It helps you develop structured meal plans, healthy eating, and weight management goals.

Your provider may prescribe antidepressants if you are anxious or depressed. Medicines to help with weight loss may also be prescribed.

Support Groups

The stress of illness can be eased by joining a support group. Sharing with others who have common experiences and problems can help you not feel alone.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Binge eating is a treatable disorder. Long-term talk therapy seems to help the most.

Possible Complications

With binge eating, you often eat unhealthy foods that are high in sugar and fat, and low in nutrients and protein. This can lead to health problems such as obesity, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, or gallbladder disease.

Other possible health problems may include:

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Joint pain
- Menstrual problems

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider if you think you, or someone you care for, might have a pattern of binge eating or bulimia.

Alternative Names

Eating disorder - binge eating; Eating - binge; Overeating - compulsive; Compulsive overeating

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