

Binge Eating Disorder

Binge eating disorder is the most common type of eating disorder in the United States. People with binge eating disorder often feel out of control and eat a large amount of food at one time (called a binge). Unlike people with other eating disorders, people who have binge eating disorder do not throw up the food or exercise too much. Binge eating disorder is a serious health problem, but people with binge eating disorder can get better with treatment.

Q: Who is at risk for binge eating disorder?

A: Binge eating disorder affects more than 3 percent of women in the United States. More than half of people with binge eating disorder are women.

Binge eating disorder affects women of all races and ethnicities.

Some women may be more at risk for binge eating disorder.

- Women and girls who diet often are 12 times more likely to binge eat than women and girls who do not diet.
- Binge eating disorder affects more young and middle-aged women than older women. On average, women develop binge eating disorder in their early to mid-20s. But eating disorders are happening more often in older women.

Q: What are the symptoms of binge eating disorder?

A: It can be difficult to tell whether someone has binge eating disorder. Many women with binge eating disorder hide their behavior because they are embarrassed.

You may have binge eating disorder if, for at least once a week over the past three months, you have binged. Binge eating disorder means you have at least three of these symptoms while binging:

- Eating faster than normal
- Eating until uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts of food when not hungry
- Eating alone because of embarrassment
- Feeling disgusted, depressed, or guilty afterward

Q: How does binge eating disorder affect a woman's health?

A: Many, but not all, women with binge eating disorder are overweight or obese. Obesity raises your risk for many serious health problems:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Gallbladder disease
- Certain types of cancer, including breast, endometrial (a type of uterine cancer), colorectal, kidney, esophageal, pancreatic, thyroid, and gallbladder cancer
- Problems with your menstrual cycle, including preventing ovulation, which can make it harder to get pregnant

People with binge eating disorder often have other serious mental health illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, or substance abuse.

Q: How is binge eating disorder diagnosed?

A: Your doctor or nurse will ask you questions about your symptoms and medical history. It may be difficult to talk to a doctor or nurse about secret eating behaviors. But doctors and nurses want to help you be healthy. Being honest about your eating behaviors with a doctor or nurse is a good way to ask for help.

Q: How is binge eating disorder treated?

A: Your doctor may refer you to a team of doctors, nutritionists, and therapists who will work to help you get better. Treatment plans may include nutrition therapy, psychotherapy (sometimes called “talk therapy”), support groups, or medicine like antidepressants.

Most girls and women do get better with treatment and are able to eat in healthy ways again.

For more information...

on binge eating disorder, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

MentalHealth.gov, HHS
MentalHealth.gov

National Institute of Mental Health, NIH, HHS
866-615-6464 • *www.nimh.nih.gov*

Weight-control Information Network, NIDDK, NIH, HHS
877-946-4627 • *www.win.niddk.nih.gov*

American Psychological Association
800-374-2721 • *www.apa.org*

National Eating Disorders Association
800-931-2237 • *www.nationaleatingdisorders.org*

The Obesity Society
301-563-6526 • *www.obesity.org*

The Office on Women’s Health is grateful for the additional reviews by:

- Mark Chavez, Ph.D., Chief, Eating Disorders Research Program, National Institute of Mental Health
- Kamryn T. Eddy, Ph.D., and Jennifer J. Thomas, Ph.D., Associate Professors of Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, Co-Directors of the Eating Disorders Clinical and Research Program, Massachusetts General Hospital
- Kendra Becker, M.S., Clinical Fellow in Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital

All material contained on this page is free of copyright restrictions and may be copied, reproduced, or duplicated without permission of the Office on Women’s Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. Citation of the source is appreciated.

Page last updated: May 31, 2017.

Content last reviewed: June 26, 2016.

 www.facebook.com/HHSOWH

 www.twitter.com/WomensHealth

 www.youtube.com/WomensHealthgov

www.womenshealth.gov | 800-994-9662

