



FEEDING AND EATING DISORDERS

BULIMIA NERVOSA

What it is:

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder in which an individual has recurring episodes of binge eating, typically followed by purging behaviour such as self-induced vomiting, in an effort to prevent weight gain from the excessive food consumed. Individuals with bulimia nervosa closely resemble those with anorexia nervosa in their obsession with the way they perceive their body and size, and their desire to lose weight. Individuals with this disorder will typically fall within normal or overweight body weight range, and will commonly restrict their diet to low calorie or "diet" food on most occasions.

Binge eating is defined as eating in a set period of time, more than most individuals would consume in a similar time period and under similar circumstances. Typically individuals with this disorder will binge on foods that they deprive themselves of on a daily basis, as these items are seen as unhealthy or fattening. The individual will also feel a lack of control over their eating during the binge period, as if they have no control over their actions or cannot stop themselves from eating, even when they become painfully full.

Individuals with bulimia nervosa usually feel a great deal of shame about their eating habits, and will try to hide their binge eating from friends and family. After a binge episode, the individual will typically engage in purging behaviour in an attempt to prevent weight gain from the excessive amounts of food consumed. Vomiting is the most common form of purge behaviour, although some individuals make use of laxatives or even enemas as a means of purging. Excessive exercise may also be used to try and compensate for the binge episode, and to attempt to prevent weight gain. Oesophageal tears, gastric rupture and cardiac arrhythmias are all potential health risks of prolonged bulimia nervosa.



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Common symptoms:

1. Recurring episodes of binge eating – eating in a set period of time (for example 2 hours or less) a great deal more than an individual would typically eat in that time and in those circumstances
2. Feeling a lack of control during this episode, feeling that you cannot stop eating or you have no control over how much you eat
3. Recurring purging behaviour to try prevent weight gain from the binge eating, for example vomiting, using laxatives, or fasting
4. Excessive exercise to try and compensate for the binge eating and prevent weight gain
5. The binge episodes and purging behaviour happen at least once a week
6. The individual has a distorted perception of their body shape, weight and size, and has an obsession with losing weight

Causes:

Overanxious disorder in childhood, depressive symptoms, social anxiety disorder, weight concerns and low self-esteem are all associated with the development of bulimia nervosa. Individuals who experience childhood physical or sexual abuse are at increased risk of developing the disorder. Childhood obesity, and early pubertal maturation may also be risk factors. A family history of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa may also be a risk factor, as genetic vulnerabilities for the disorder have been found.

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*