

Bulimia



This factsheet provides bullet points of bulimia, its symptoms and the treatments and support options.

What is bulimia nervosa?

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder characterised by binge eating (eating more than most people would do in a certain time period, often high calorie foods) and inappropriate compensating mechanisms (e.g. purging/vomiting, use of laxatives, extreme exercise) to prevent weight gain.

In order for a diagnosis of bulimia to be given an individual needs to have had recurrent episodes (at least twice a week for three months) of bingeing and compensating mechanisms. The onset of bulimia tends to be late adolescence to early adulthood.

Symptoms of bulimia nervosa

Behavioural symptoms

- An episode of binge eating, in which more is eaten in a period than other people would consume, often sweet, high calorie foods, such as ice-cream or cake
- An episode to prevent weight gain eg self-induced vomiting or misuse of laxatives, diuretics or enemas, fasting /excessive exercise

Physiological symptoms

- Vomiting and purging often leads to dietary and physical problems eg tooth enamel erosion, sore throat, digestion problems
- Body minerals loss often leads to fatigue and can be linked to swelling of legs and feet
- Individuals may eat in secret, then try to conceal the bingeing and compensating behaviour, (because of the sense of shame felt)

Psychological symptoms

- In general, the way individuals judge themselves and their self esteem is largely influenced by body shape and weight
- Individuals may experience feelings of shame over their eating problems, and eat in secret to try and conceal symptoms
- Binge eating is often triggered by an individual feeling low and these negative feelings relating in some way to body weight, shape and food, experiencing stressors, or intense hunger following a period of restraint, (e.g. extreme dieting)
- During a bingeing episode, people commonly feel a sense of lacking control over eating

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Treatment options for bulimia nervosa

Treatment approaches may include counselling or therapy to help understand the reasons for abnormal eating; behavioural therapy may help find ways of regulating and normalising food intake. A psycho-educational approach can also help individuals understand the harmful effects of vomiting and laxative abuse.

Where can I find help and support?

SANE provides emotional support to anyone affected by mental health problems, including families, friends and carers. Using our database, we can also offer support in considering other options for help, including local services and agencies.

One-to-one support:

- Helpline: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm – 10.30pm every day)
- Email: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/email/
- Textcare: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/textcare/

Peer support:

- Support Forum: http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/supportforum/

Details can be found on our website at www.sane.org.uk

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