

Bulimia



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 (eg purging/vomiting, use of laxatives, extreme exercise) to prevent weight gain. Recurrent episodes (at least twice a week for three months) of bingeing and compensating mechanisms. Onset tends to be late adolescence – early adulthood.

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
- May eat in secret, try and conceal the bingeing and compensating behavior, (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, (eg extreme dieting).
- During a bingeing episode, people commonly feel a sense of lacking control over eating

Treatment

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.