

# Binge Eating

Psychologists and physicians are still working to understand eating disorders and learning how to help their patients overcome them. A large amount of recent research has revealed just how common these disorders are, as well as how devastating they are for their victims. Many people who used to suffer in secret, scared of what was happening to their bodies but unsure of where to go for help, have overcome disorders like binge eating and regained control of their own health. In many cases, the most powerful tool against binge eating is knowledge. Understanding the reasons and consequences of this disorder removes much of its intimidation and makes it easier to beat.



## LEARN MORE

Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.

**National Eating Disorders Association**  
[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

**National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, Inc.**  
[www.anad.org](http://www.anad.org)

## Definition



Overeating on a regular basis is not the same as binge eating. Medical experts have coined the term to define a very specific disorder, which seems to display the same patterns and behaviors in most of those afflicted with it.

Someone who suffers from binge eating experiences “episodes” of uncontrolled eating of very large amounts of food in a limited amount of time (usually around two hours or less). While we all sometimes let go of our diet and eat more than normal at a meal, in binge eaters the behavior is chronic - they overeat dramatically several times a week for months or years. From the individual’s perspective, the most obvious defining feature of the disorder is probably the feeling of being out of control. If you feel that the food you eat has power over you, this is an indication of a serious problem.

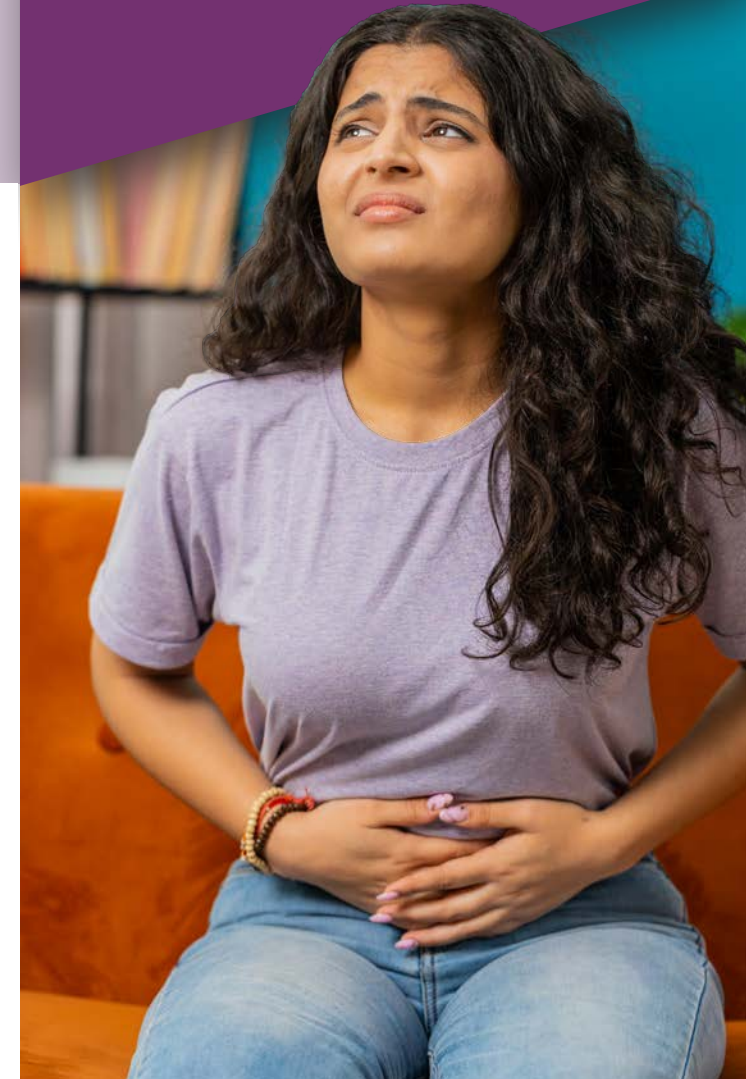
## Related Diseases

Binge eating does not include the signature feature of some other common eating disorders: purging, the immediate elimination of food after eating it. Anorexia and bulimia affect the body in different ways from binge eating and usually stem from different causes.

*The first step in escaping the binge eating cycle is talking with a professional.*



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## Causes

There are two primary causes of binge eating, although scientists are still working to discover whether there may be additional, less familiar causes.

### Depression and Stress

Depression and stress leave a person feeling unfulfilled. For some people, eating appears to be an escape from that feeling, a way to get some immediate comfort and satisfaction. If eating becomes a common response to stress, the body can grow addicted to it, just like a drug or alcohol. Binge eating almost always leads to embarrassment and a damaged self-image, which in turn creates more depression and stress. The cycle continues, and physical and mental problems grow larger and more difficult to combat.



## Extreme Dieting

Dieting in a balanced, responsible, and consistent way is a great way to lose weight, but extreme diets hold numerous dangers. Many fad and starvation diets put incredible stress on the body by depriving it of vital nutrients and shocking it with a dramatic change from its normal routine. The body responds to this sudden lack of food by preparing to stock up on nutrients the next time a sizable amount of food is available. This preparation comes in the form of an uncontrollable hunger. Eventually, it is likely that the body will acquire the need to eat as much as possible in a very short amount of time. The risk of developing a binge eating disorder is just one of the reasons to avoid extreme dieting and adopt a more balanced approach to health instead.



## Consequences

Binge eating affects the body and mind in a number of negative ways. Without attention, this highly unhealthy behavior damages the entire body in many ways and can even shorten life span.

### Physical Effects

When the body takes in more calories than it needs for activity, it stores them in the form of fat. Consistent binge eating creates a huge risk for obesity as well as the long list of diseases associated with it. However, someone with a high metabolism may show few outward signs of weight gain even though they binge eat. However, high cholesterol, sugar, and sodium levels are probably still putting stress on the body's systems.

### Mental Effects

It is important to note the dangers of depression and stress associated with binge eating. They can make it nearly impossible to interact normally with others, develop and maintain close relationships, and enjoy a wide range of life experiences. If they are allowed to continue, they can even drive an individual toward self-destructive or suicidal thoughts.

## Solutions

The first step to escaping the binge eating cycle is talking with a professional. A psychiatrist or nurse can help you approach the disorder with confidence and determination, rather than feeling controlled and intimidated by it. Accountability is an important part of this process;

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## Secretive Behavior

The low self-esteem and embarrassment that most binge eaters feel drives them to hide their unusual behavior from the people around them. Particularly if they do not understand what is driving them to binge eat, they feel that others will label them and look down on them if they find out what is going on. If you find yourself avoiding others at meal times and fearing the idea of others seeing you eat, then you recognize that your behavior is not normal.



knowing that you will have to discuss an episode with your doctor can be a great deterrent to binge eating.

Allow the people who love you most to help you overcome your disorder. No one is interested in ridiculing or ostracizing someone close to them who has an eating disorder; instead, they will do everything they can to help you win your battle and put this unhealthy, destructive behavior behind you.

## Recognizing Binge Eating

Binge eating is often difficult for others to detect. Parents, school officials, and friends can help by keeping an eye out for the distinctive symptoms of binge eating: a desire to eat alone, avoiding talking about food, unusual weight gain without an obvious cause, and apparent depression or low self-esteem. As doctors study this disorder more and raise awareness of it, more people will face it head-on and overcome it with the help of their family and friends.