

# Binge Eating Disorder

## What is Binge eating disorder?

Binge eating disorder, also known as compulsive overeating, is a newly recognized eating disorder. Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses in which emotions and thinking patterns cause a person to adopt harmful eating habits, such as overeating or starving. Often, these habits are a way of coping with depression, stress or anxiety.

Binge eating disorder is a serious condition characterized by uncontrollable eating and a resulting weight gain. People with binge eating disorder frequently eat large amounts of food (beyond the point of feeling full) while feeling a loss of control over their eating. Although the bingeing behavior is similar to what occurs in bulimia nervosa, people with binge eating disorder usually do not engage in purging by vomiting or using laxatives.

Many people who have binge eating disorder use food as a way to cope with uncomfortable feelings and emotions. These are people who never learned how to properly deal with stress, and find it comforting and soothing to eat food. Unfortunately, they often end up feeling sad and guilty about not being able to control their eating, which increases the stress and fuels the cycle.

## How Common Is Binge Eating Disorder?

Although only recently recognized as a distinct condition, binge eating disorder is probably the most common eating disorder. Most people with binge eating disorder are obese (more than 20% above a healthy body weight), but normal-weight people also can be affected.

Binge eating disorder probably affects 2% of all adults, or about 1 million to 2 million Americans. Among mildly obese people in self-help or commercial weight loss programs, 10% to 15% have binge eating disorder. The disorder is even more common in those with severe obesity.

Binge eating disorder is slightly more common in women than in men. The disorder affects African Americans as often as whites; its frequency in other ethnic groups is not yet known. Obese people with binge eating disorder often became overweight at a younger age than those without the disorder. They also might have more frequent episodes of losing and regaining weight.

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