

Bulimia Nervosa - What is it and What Will Help



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What is Bulimia?

Bulimia is an eating disorder characterized by the eating of a large amount of food in a short space of time (binging) followed by self-induced vomiting, or excessive use of [Laxatives](#), diuretics, fasting or exercise to 'rid' the body of the food (purging).

People with Bulimia nervosa struggle with their binge eating disorder. They often feel that they are out of control during their binge sessions and then feel tremendous shame and guilt afterwards. It is the self-induced purging that makes them feel a release of this [Tension](#) and guilt.

Characteristics of Bulimics

Unlike Anorexia Nervosa, (where the individual usually feels a sense of accomplishment and often denies having a problem), Bulimics generally feel ashamed of their binge eating disorder and know that what they are doing 'is not normal'.

They evaluate themselves primarily on their body weight and shape, and thus often have a very poor self-esteem. Ironically, most people with Bulimia tend to be either overweight or fall within 10% of their normal body weight, and rarely attain the skinny figures that they desire and aim for.

As with other eating disorders, most Bulimics are female and the disorder tends to develop in adolescents or young women. The binge eating disorder known as Bulimia is much more prevalent in Western Societies than elsewhere in the world. This is possibly due to the common society-ideal of a slim, trim figure that is emphasized and encouraged by the media. Bulimia nervosa is a serious condition that can cause extremely severe medical consequences if left untreated. Thankfully, there are binge eating disorder treatment plans that offer help for overcoming Bulimia.

Overcoming Bulimia nervosa can be very challenging so the earlier treatment starts, the better the chances are for a positive outcome. It is important to stick to treatment and resolve underlying emotional issues to reduce the chances of relapse.

Diagnosing Bulimia

Should you seek professional help for yourself or your child, a battery of tests will be done by a health care professional before a diagnosis is made. This should include a full physical examination, with possible blood tests and urine analysis. Your doctor will be checking for confirmation of an eating disorder, as well as checking for any damage or medical complications that may have been caused by the Bulimia.



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A person overcoming Bulimia will also be referred to a psychologist who will take a full personal and family history, discuss your feelings and attitudes towards food and body-image and also note the history of your condition - how often you binge and purge, the emotions associated with these events and how it is affecting your life.

Symptoms of Bulimia

Eating a large amount of food in a fixed period of time, followed by compensating techniques (exercise) or purging (vomiting or use of [Laxatives](#)). This must occur at least twice a week for a period of three months.

- sense of loss of control during binges
- Self-evaluation that is unreasonably influenced by body shape and weight
- Distorted body perception that may be accompanied by poor self-esteem, anxiety and depression
- A pre-occupation with [Dieting](#), but also a tendency to hoard food or food-related items such as recipes and cookbooks

What Causes Bulimia?

- Genetics – Research suggests that women with a Bulimic family member are more likely to develop Bulimia than the average women. While this may suggest that there is a genetic component to the disorder, it may be due to the shared experiences and learned behaviors within the family context. It is also likely that personality traits related to Bulimia such as perfectionism, emotional sensitivity and addictive personality tendencies are inherited rather than the disorder itself.
- Family and learnt behavior – As mentioned learnt behavior may contribute to an increased risk of Bulimia. Parents who place great importance on physical appearances, criticize their child's body shape, or who are [Dieting](#) themselves, are more likely to have a child who will develop an eating disorder.
- Culture and The Media – Western society places great emphasis on the ideal body and this is especially aimed at women. The pre-pubescent female figure is highly valued and many young women feel that they need to strive for this unrealistic and unhealthy ideal. Many TV programs and magazines encourage thinness, as hundreds of young women aspire to look like the models and actresses that society idealizes. Both young men and women have almost come to expect that these "air-brushed" and semi-starving models represent the normal population.
- Restrictive eating – [Dieting](#) may be a huge cause of Bulimia. Studies have shown that [Dieting](#) and restrictive eating lead to obsessions about food which may ultimately lead to Bulimia. Once again, society, the media, peers, and sometimes parents, often promote [Dieting](#) as apposed to a healthy life-style and balanced diet. Being overweight as a child or teenager is often a precipitator to developing Bulimia.

Help for Bulimia

There are a number of binge eating disorder treatment options available to help in the struggle against Bulimia. Some form of psychotherapy is usually necessary as Bulimia is essentially a psychological disorder wrapped in emotions and personal conflicts that need to be dealt with. Pharmaceutical medications are also commonly prescribed in order to help treat accompanying problems such as depression.

Psychotherapy

Individual, family or group therapy may be very beneficial in dealing with Bulimia. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) helps the individual address the negative ideas surrounding food, body-image and self-esteem, while providing constructive ways of implementing new food habits.



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Family therapy may help the entire family deal with underlying conflicts and provide coping techniques for the family as a whole, while support groups provide a source of support and comfort. Individual therapy addresses underlying personal issues such as self-esteem and guilt associated with food. On the whole, psychotherapy is very successful in treating Bulimia and it is advised that you research which type or types of therapy would best suit you.

Drug Treatments

Medication may be prescribed to Bulimic patients to help improve related symptoms such as accompanying depression, anxiety or obsessive behavior. Commonly prescribed drugs include antidepressants such as fluoxetine (Prozac), paroxetine (Paxil), and the antipsychotic drug lithium. While these drugs may help initially, up to 80% of patients relapse after the medication is discontinued, and in many cases, the side-effects are distressing.

It is strongly advised that you research any prescription medication and their side-effects before agreeing to drug therapy.

Natural Herbal and [Homeopathic Remedies](#) for Bulimia

Of the binge eating disorder treatment options available, [Natural Remedies](#) can be of great benefit in alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression associated with Bulimia without the negative side effects of prescription medications. Some herbal formulas that assist with the related symptoms of Bulimia include Passiflora Incarnata – to soothe the mind and calm the nerves. Hypericum perforatum (St John's Wort) has been very successful in treating the depression which often accompanies an eating disorder.

Natural remedies such as [MindSoothe](#) may facilitate a reasonable attitude and lessen the burden on pressured minds. [MindSoothe](#) may also promote a well-adjusted outlook and positive temperament and support healthy sleep patterns and routine appetite.

Are there other disorders that may be related to Bulimia?

Certain disorders and ailments may accompany Bulimia, these include:

- Anorexia Nervosa
- Depression
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder ([OCD](#))
- Substance Abuse

Tips for Coping with Bulimia

- Do not diet or skip meals! The more you restrict your food intake, the more likely you are to desire what you cannot have and binge. Rather eat a healthy balanced diet and contact a dietician or nutritionist for a professional and personalized meal plan. Short term diets do not have long-term effects so aim to make healthy eating a positive life-style change!
- Try to avoid over-eating or binging. If you avoid binging, you will be less likely to feel the overwhelming need to purge. This may not be all that easy, but start by simply being aware of situations where large amounts of food are going to be tempting you to compulsively over eat. E. g. Buffet dinners or 3 course meals.
- Avoid certain media images (T.V programs, magazines and internet sites) or peers that may encourage a "skinner-than-thou" type figure. These are unhealthy influences that give you unrealistic expectations of what a normal, healthy female figure should look like and are no good for your self-esteem!
- Love yourself for who you are! Learn to appreciate your positive attributes and don't judge yourself based on your body-image.
- Identify the situations and emotional circumstances that trigger your binges and purges. Once you discover these underlying issues you can make steps to cope with them. For instance, if your



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Bulimia is particularly bad during times of stress, try some stress management techniques and reduce the amount of stress factors in your life. Try to keep a journal and note down your triggers.

- Bring your problem into the light. The secrecy and shame of Bulimia often perpetuates the problem. Try opening up to your family or a trusted friend. You may find they are an incredible source of encouragement and support.
- Join a support group such as Over Eaters Anonymous. They provide you with recovery steps and the support and understanding that will equip you to successfully face your disorder.
- Be patient with yourself. Bulimia is not just about bingeing and purging, it is an emotional illness where one uses food to deal with difficult emotions. Don't expect to be better in a week or a month. However if you keep striving for support and ways of healing yourself as a whole, emotionally and physically, you will find you slowly grow into healthier ways of living that fulfill you from the inside.

Tips for Concerned Parents

- Many parents feel concerned that their child may have an eating disorder or may develop one. Bulimia is less noticeable than Anorexia as there is usually not a dramatic drop in weight and your child may eat in front of you, only to purge it when you are not aware. Be wary if your child always rushes to the bathroom after meals, or repeatedly excuses himself or herself from the table before everyone else. He or she may also try to hoard food or [Laxatives](#) in his/her room. If children show any peculiar behavior after meals, (for example, they insist on running around the block each night after dinner), you may want to investigate further.
- If you are concerned, discuss it with your child in a way that is non-accusational. It is important to give your child the opportunity to be honest with you without you losing your composure. Remind him or her that you are always there to talk to and support her.
- Research the facts about Bulimia and find out about treatment options. There are plenty of recommended books and internet forums that will be able to assist you in helping your child.
- Bulimia does not disappear overnight. It is an uphill struggle that sometimes entails set backs. If your child is in the process of trying to recover, she may slip back into old ways - feel free to confront her in a constructive manner but bear in mind it is not a sign of failure. The road to recovery can be slow and painful for a person learning new habits and positive ways of dealing with uncomfortable feelings.
- Help your child develop a healthy relationship with food by adopting one yourself. Minimize talk about [Dieting](#) and weight. If you are critical of weight in yourself and others, your child may start to develop unrealistic expectations.
- Praise your children for what they do and not what they look like. Encourage their inner strengths and beautiful personality traits.
- Have sit down meals with your family each night. Make it a time for conversations and connecting with each other.
- Provide your child with problem solving skills and encourage communication within your family. Many cases of eating disorders result when underlying family conflicts are left unresolved.

Related Products

- Native Remedies [MindSoothe](#) - Promote balanced mood and feelings of wellbeing
- Native Remedies [PureCalm](#) - Aids nervous system in stress resistance for balanced moods and feelings of well being
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