

Bulimia Nervosa

Introduction

Bulimia nervosa, or bulimia, is an eating disorder. A person with bulimia eats a large amount of food in a short amount of time. To prevent weight gain, the person then purges. Bulimia can be hard to overcome. It can lead to life threatening problems. But with treatment, you can return to healthier eating habits and reverse serious complications.

This reference summary explains bulimia. It covers symptoms and causes of the condition, as well as treatment options.



Bulimia

Bulimia is a type of eating disorder. It is a dangerous cycle of bingeing and purging. A person with bulimia bingeing on food. Binge eating means to eat a large amount of food in a short period of time. To prevent weight gain, the person then purges. Purging usually means forcing yourself to vomit. It can also mean taking laxatives, diet pills, diuretics or other medications. A person with bulimia may also over-exercise or stop eating after a binge.

A person with bulimia may be obsessed with their weight and body shape. They may judge themselves harshly. Some people use bulimia as a way to try to cope with emotional problems.

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Bulimia often happens with other conditions, such as:

- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Obsessive behaviors.
- Substance abuse.

Women are more likely than men to have eating disorders. But anyone can have one.

Symptoms

Symptoms of bulimia nervosa may include:

- Being obsessed with your body shape and weight.
- Fear of gaining weight.
- Feeling like you can't control your eating habits.

A person with bulimia eats too much food when they binge. They may eat until the point of pain or discomfort.

A person with bulimia tries to purge the food and calories they ate by:

- Vomiting on purpose. They may put their finger down their throat or use an object, such as a toothbrush. They may eat or drink a substance that causes vomiting.
- Exercising too much.

A person with bulimia may also try to purge by:

- Misusing laxatives, diuretics or enemas.
- Using dietary supplements or herbal products for weight loss.

A laxative is a substance that causes a bowel movement. A diuretic is a type of drug that causes the kidneys to make more urine. This rids the body of extra fluid and salt, which decreases weight. An enema is an injection of a liquid through the anus into the large bowel to cause a bowel movement. Dietary supplements are substances, such as vitamins, that can be used to help fulfill nutritional needs.

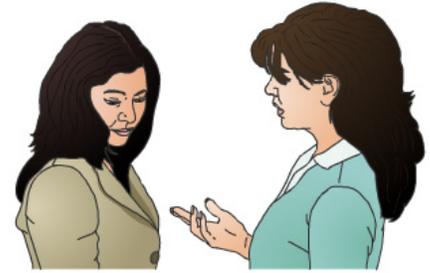
Most people with bulimia are a normal weight or even slightly overweight. Guilt can play a big role in bulimia. People with bulimia often try to hide their eating disorder.



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A person with bulimia may:

- Complain about being fat.
- Have a negative body image.
- Eat unusually large amounts of food in one sitting.
- Not want to eat in public or in front of others.



A person with bulimia may also:

- Go to the bathroom right after eating or during meals.
- Have damaged teeth and gums due to the stomach acid in vomit.
- Have sores, scars or calluses on their knuckles or hands from forcing themselves to vomit.



If you have symptoms of bulimia, contact your health care provider. Symptoms may get worse without treatment. If you are worried about someone's health, urge them to talk to a health care provider.

Causes

There are many possible factors that can lead to the development of an eating disorder. Dieting, stress or uncomfortable emotions can trigger a binge. Purging helps a person with bulimia feel more in control of their life. It can ease their anxiety. Some people are more likely to have bulimia because of their genes or hormones. The balance of certain chemicals in the brain may also play a role.



Some emotional traits may also lead to bulimia. A person with bulimia may have low self esteem, may hate the way they look or may feel hopeless. They may be moody, have problems talking about their feelings or have a hard time controlling their actions. A person with bulimia may feel pressure from their culture to be thin. Peer pressure may also cause a person to want to lose weight or to be thin.

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Stress caused by life changes may also increase a person's risk for an eating disorder. Stressful transitions may include:

- A new school, home or job.
- A relationship breakup.
- The death or illness of a loved one.
- Other traumas.

Complications

Bulimia nervosa may lead to many serious complications. It may lead to death.

Possible complications of bulimia include:

- Dehydration.
- Heart problems.
- Severe tooth decay and gum disease.
- Digestive problems.

Bulimia may also lead to:

- Anxiety and depression.
- Loss of period in women.
- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- Osteoporosis and bone problems.



Osteoporosis is a condition that causes bones to become weak. It can lead to fractures.

Diagnosis

Your health care provider will perform a physical exam. He or she will ask you questions about your personal and family health history.

Your health care provider may take blood tests to check:

- The balance of electrolytes in your body.
- How well your liver, kidneys and thyroid gland are working.



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Electrolytes are minerals that affect the amount of water in your body.

Your health care provider will ask you about your thoughts, feelings and eating habits. X-rays may be done to check for pneumonia or heart problems. Bone density testing may be done to check your bone health. An electrocardiogram may be done to look for heart irregularities. This test shows changes in the electrical activity of the heart over time as well as heart damage.

Treatment

Treatments for bulimia nervosa may include a combination of:

- Counseling and behavioral therapy.
- Nutritional counseling.
- Medicines.

Individual, family-based or group therapy may help a person with bulimia recover from the condition. A therapist can help a person with bulimia avoid problem situations that may lead to bingeing and purging. Dietitians and other health care providers can design an eating plan to help achieve a healthy weight, normal eating habits and good nutrition.



Antidepressants may help reduce the symptoms of bulimia. These can help treat symptoms of depression or anxiety. Health care providers may also recommend vitamin and mineral supplements. Treatment at a health care facility may be needed if serious complications happen.

Even if a person with bulimia does want to get better, bulimia can be hard to overcome. It is often an ongoing, lifelong battle. People with bulimia may feel the need to binge and purge during periods of high stress. Ongoing or occasional therapy may help.

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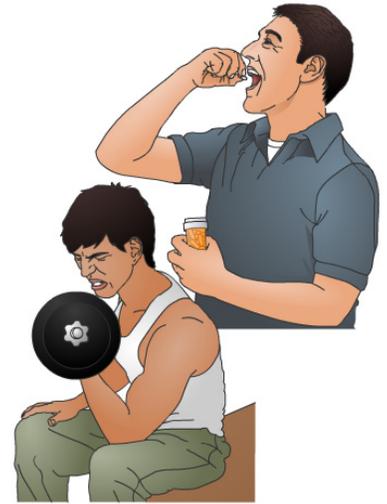
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