



Bulimia Nervosa

Definition: Bulimia Nervosa is characterized by frequent binge eating followed by behavior such as self-induced vomiting to avoid weight gain. To meet the criteria for a bulimia diagnosis the behavior must occur at least once per week for three months. Many people “binge and purge” in secret so they can often hide their problem successfully from others for years. The condition usually begins during adolescence and occurs primarily in women.

Symptoms: A person who eats an amount of food in a short period of time that is larger than most people would eat during the same time and under similar circumstances may be exhibiting symptoms of Bulimia Nervosa. An individual may feel a lack of control; they cannot stop eating or control what or how much they are eating. In order to avoid weight gain, inappropriate behavior reoccurs such as self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics or other medicines, excessive exercise, or fasting. This person usually is unduly influenced by their weight and body shape; they usually also have low self-esteem.

Causes: The cause of bulimia is not known, but is most likely a combination of genetics, family behavior, and social values (such as admiring thinness.) Your risk for having bulimia increases if a family member has the condition. People with a difficult childhood, such as family problems, arguments, and criticism, may be at risk for bulimia. Stressful life events such as divorce, moving, or death of a loved one can sometimes trigger bulimia. Bulimia can be seen as a way to take control of your life.

Treatment: When you have bulimia, you may need several types of treatment, although combining psychotherapy with antidepressants may be the most effective for overcoming the disorder. Treatment generally involves a team approach that includes you, your family, your primary care doctor or other medical provider, as well as a mental health provider and a dietitian experienced in treating eating disorders. Treatment usually starts with admitting there is an eating disorder and aims to help re-establish a healthy attitude towards food. A food diary may help identify what triggers binge eating. To recover from bulimia, you need to change your eating habits, change the way you think about food, and gain weight safely, if necessary.

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