

Binge Eating Disorder?

What is Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is a serious eating disorder characterised by regular episodes of binge eating that occur **once a week or more for at least three months** and is associated with a significant level of distress.

A binge eating episode involves:

- Eating an unusually large portion of food in one sitting (e.g., at least 2-3 times more than the average person might eat for a typical meal or snack)
- Eating this large portion within a short period of time (2 hrs)
- Feeling out of control and finding it hard to stop

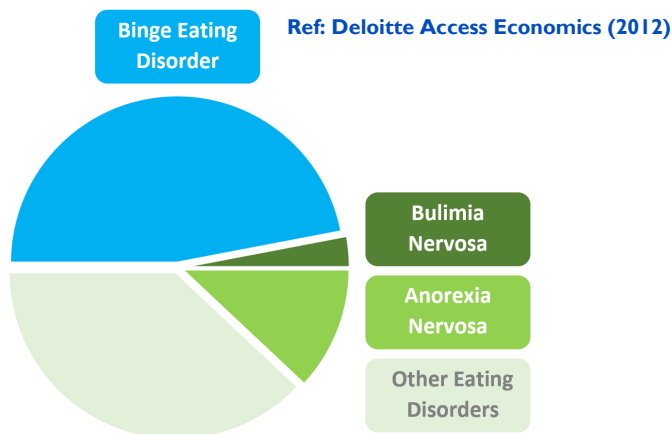
During a binge eating episode, people may...

- Eat more quickly than normal
- Eat until they feel uncomfortably full
- Eat large amounts of food even if they are not feeling physically hungry
- Eat alone or in secret due feeling embarrassed or ashamed



A binge episode differs from overeating, as it is associated with feeling out of control and finding it hard to stop eating. Binge eating is also associated with more negative feelings (such as guilt, shame, and sadness) than overeating. For people with BED, these binge eating episodes have a severe impact on their wellbeing and functioning. For more information on binge eating episodes, please see our handout [Binge Eating](#).

According to the National Eating Disorders Collaboration, BED is the most common eating disorder, affecting about half of all people with eating disorders.



BED can affect anyone regardless of gender and age. Despite being the most common eating disorder, many people with BED do not receive treatment. Some people with BED have reported feeling stigmatised and judged. Discrimination and feelings of shame may prevent them from reaching out for help and create real barriers for those with BED to access the treatment they need.

It is important to remember that you **do not** need to have a certain body size in order to be diagnosed with an eating disorder. Eating disorders can affect anyone regardless of your body weight, size, or shape, and all people are worthy of help.

Impacts of Binge Eating Disorder

BED is associated with physical consequences and psychological and emotional distress. Regular binge eating can lead to unstable blood sugars, disrupt hunger and fullness cues, and make it difficult to work out your natural set point weight range. It can also lead to liver dysfunction and increased acid reflux.



BED can also be associated with strong negative thoughts and emotions. People with BED often feel distressed by their eating, which fuels their self-criticism and feelings of guilt, shame, and disgust. This can then increase the chances of someone engaging in future binge eating, keeping them caught in this vicious cycle. Due to these negative feelings, people with BED may withdraw from social activities and experience a reduced quality of life. Lots of people with BED report being unhappy with their body weight or shape, and many people with BED report having a long history of dieting or other disordered eating.

Due to these significant physical and psychological consequences, it is important for people with BED to access treatment.

Treatment for BED

According to the [NICE Guidelines](#), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is the leading evidence-based treatment for BED in adults. Treatment involves learning to understand your eating patterns, why binges occur, then developing strategies to help reduce your binge eating. To learn more, you can read our [Orientation to Treatment](#) handout. Although it can be challenging, a full recovery is possible and very worthwhile.

Some benefits of recovery include:

- Finding new helpful strategies to cope with emotional distress
- Improved mood and reduced anxiety
- Better body image and more body acceptance
- Reduced preoccupation with food, and body weight and shape
- Improved physical health and wellbeing
- A greater understanding of your own thoughts and feelings, and how they contribute to behaviours
- Less fear around avoided foods

You can access our free CBT self-help workbook [Break Free from ED](#) to learn strategies to reduce binge eating and help with an eating disorder.

Other tips for getting help for BED:

- Speak to your GP
- Eat regularly, adequately, and include a variety of foods
- Learn to sit with uncomfortable feelings. Please see our useful self-help workbook [Facing Your Feelings](#).
- Seek support from a "Health At Every Size" dietitian
- Seek support from a psychologist

Please note that this handout is not a substitute for treatment for BED. BED is a serious eating disorder. If you or someone close to you has signs of an eating disorder it is important to see a GP and discuss seeking help as soon as possible.