

# vomiting and your health

If you look back on when you started vomiting, you probably only did it occasionally, to regain control over breaking your diet or eating more than you'd planned. Once you'd got over the discomfort and revulsion, you probably began thinking of it as a "safety net", to use whenever you ate the wrong foods or ate too much.

You may have believed that, as long as you could vomit soon after eating, you were able to get rid of the calories you'd eaten. And you may have thought that, since you were going to vomit anyway, you might as well eat as much as you could. Also, you probably found that it was easier to vomit with a full stomach...Or maybe you started thinking that if you vomited after eating anything at all, not even a "binge", you could lose weight....so that eating or eating too much was OK, it was safe.....

At this point vomiting became a HABIT and part of a vicious cycle of (binge) eating and purging.

## Dangers of Chronic Vomiting

- Chronic vomiting can result in erosion of tooth enamel – in some cases, teeth will need to be replaced (see handout *Vomiting & Dental Care*)
- The parotid glands (salivary glands) can swell up and cause "chipmunk face".
- Tearing and bleeding of the oesophagus can occur.
- Electrolyte imbalance can result in seizures, cardiac arrest and even death.
- Chronic vomiting can result in a disruption of your digestive system so that even small amounts of food in your stomach can leave you feeling uncomfortable and trigger the urge to vomit.
- Apart from encouraging overeating and distorting your ability to discriminate hunger and fullness, there are a number of psychological consequences to vomiting. You feel guilt, shame, anxiety and depression, which can make you feel worthless and out of control – and these feelings can trigger a binge. So you end up binge eating in response to the shame about vomiting – which means additional vomiting. It's the vicious cycle once again.



## Myths About Vomiting

### Myth 1. Vomiting will prevent weight gain

This vomiting began as a way of dealing with and reducing the consequences of overeating (weight gain), and perhaps the negative emotions that often accompany a binge, or trigger it.....



### Fact: vomiting tends to ENCOURAGE overeating and weight gain.

You have a false sense of security of vomiting as a way out, because in reality it can lead to larger binges and weight gain – which is what you're trying to avoid. One study showed that women who vomited after a binge weighed more than women who just binged... sound impossible? But, for those of you who binge, look at the amount and type of foods that you binge on now, compared to when you first started vomiting – you'll realise you're eating a lot more now. You can do this because, you think, you have vomiting as a way out, to "wipe the slate clean".

### Myth 2: Vomiting gets rid of the calories I've consumed

Most people with bulimia are of average weight. They tend to binge and then they restrict food intake for the rest of the day. So if you're hardly eating apart from your binge, why aren't you losing weight? Obviously, you're retaining enough calories from binges to maintain your weight.

### Fact: Research has shown that, contrary to popular belief, vomiting does NOT get rid of all the calories ingested, even when done immediately after eating.

Even the most successful vomiter will only be able to purge 60% of calories eaten...which means that you're probably only vomiting up 30% of calories most of the time. Think about it – if you binge on 2,000 calories and vomit up 30%...which is 600 calories...this means that you're absorbing 1,400 calories from your binge, even with your vomiting. This is because absorption begins in the mouth, continues in the oesophagus, and then in the stomach...so even if you vomit up all the contents of your stomach, many of the calories will have already been absorbed.