

When Overeating Becomes a Problem

Eating in secret, eating when not physically hungry, and out-of-control eating are part of a treatable eating condition called **Binge Eating Disorder**.

The truth is that almost everyone overeats from time to time. It can be hard to resist an extra serving of holiday food or to put away that bag of crispy potato chips. For many, occasional episodes of overeating are really just nuisance behaviors, eating that occasionally leads to uncomfortable physical or emotional feelings but does not cause any real problems or distress. If you ate too much at a family celebration or overindulged at a holiday party, you may need to let yourself off the hook. If you are able to get yourself back on track by reminding yourself to eat in response to physical hunger, you are not likely to have an overeating problem.

For some people, though, overeating can become a serious issue. Eating in secret, eating when not physically hungry, and out-of-control eating are part of a treatable eating condition called Binge Eating Disorder. This illness can affect normal weight, overweight, and obese individuals. Binge Eating Disorder involves extreme emotions, attitudes, and behaviors surrounding weight and food that impact individuals to feel good about themselves or maintain their health.



Experts estimate that just under two percent of females and one percent of males struggle with Binge Eating Disorder.

Binge Eating Disorder involves a *pattern* of disordered eating behaviors *over time* that is accompanied by troubling thoughts and feelings. Some common symptoms include:

- Eating an amount of food that is definitely larger than what most people would eat in a similar period of time under similar circumstances
- Feeling out of control during binge eating episodes
- Eating much more rapidly than normal
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
- Eating alone because of feeling embarrassed by how much you are eating
- Feeling disgusted with yourself, depressed, or very guilty afterward

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5), which is used by mental health professionals to classify disorders, a mild disorder involves one to two episodes a week. Fourteen or more episodes is described as an extreme level of impairment.

Steps to Take If You Believe Your Overeating May Be a Problem:

- Keep a log of your eating for at least a week. Record where and when episodes of overeating occur. Try to identify any situations or feelings that trigger an episode.
- If the episodes are infrequent, you may be able to make some lifestyle changes on your own to resolve the problem. Establish a food safe environment at work and at home and eliminate high risk foods that have been part of past binges.

- Identify the emotional triggers that lead to overeating and develop a plan to manage those triggers. Do you overeat when you are bored? Worried? Feeling hurt or alone? Strong emotions often precede eating episodes. If boredom is a factor for you, find activities to keep you busy during the times when you overeat most. That may mean avoiding a favorite chair or spot at the kitchen table where you overeat. If anxiety leads to overeating, make a plan to combat worry. Practice relaxation exercises and use positive, balanced self-talk to manage your critical thinking. Reach out to Carebridge for information and resources to help you strengthen your stress management plan.
- If the episodes are occurring frequently, or are causing you to gain weight, become preoccupied with eating, or suffer many of the symptoms listed above, it may be time to reach out for help. Remember that eating disorders are treatable. People do recover.
- Recognize that overeating often involves feelings of shame and secrecy. If you are embarrassed about seeking help, you are not alone. Your self-doubt and shame do not need to stop you from recovering; push through your negative thoughts to get the help you need.
- Contact Carebridge to locate an eating disorder specialist or program in your area.

For more information and support, contact Carebridge.

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