

# What is

# Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is a type of eating disorder characterised by recurrent episodes of binge eating. A binge is defined as eating an amount of food that is larger than what most people would eat in a similar period of time. While eating, the person has a sense of lack of control.

To meet diagnostic criteria the binge eating episodes occur at least once a week for three months and are not followed by compensatory behaviours.

### Binge eating episodes are associated with three (or more) of the following:

- 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 one is eating
- Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty afterward

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

## The Function of Binge Eating Disorder

Binges often occur in response to emotions, rather than hunger. Binge eating can be a way of coping with underlying personal and emotional difficulties, including boredom, loneliness and anxiety.

BED can be experienced by the individual as helping them to function by numbing their emotions, being a distraction from what is going on in their lives. Binges are followed by feelings of guilt, shame, disgust and depression.

Binge eating can also be triggered by concerns around food, weight and shape. For example, an individual may binge due to hunger from strict dieting. Feeling full or breaking a “diet rule” can also lead to a binge.

**“When I binged, I’d feel like I was in a frenzy. I didn’t stop to consider what I was eating or to enjoy it. I’d eat whatever I could find, sometimes not even chewing. Only when I felt ill would I stop. That’s when the guilt and shame of what I had just done would set in.”**

**- Lee, 36**

## Signs & Symptoms of Binge Eating

### Physical signs

- Changes in weight
- Feeling tired and not sleeping well
- Feeling bloated or constipated

### Psychological signs

- Preoccupation with eating, food, body shape and weight
- Feelings of extreme distress, sadness, anxiety and guilt during and after a binge episode
- Low self-esteem
- Increased sensitivity to comments relating to food, weight, body shape and exercise
- Depression, anxiety or irritability
- Increased sensitivity to comments relating to food, weight, body shape and exercise

### Behavioural signs

- Evidence of regular episodes of eating large amounts of food
- Secretive behaviour relating to food
- Evading questions about eating and weight
- Increased isolation and withdrawal from activities previously enjoyed
- Erratic behaviour (e.g. shoplifting food or spending large amounts of money on food)

 **1 million**

Approximately 1 million Australian adults are currently living with Binge Eating Disorder

## Treatment Options

Research suggests that a range of psychological therapies such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) are most effective. Ongoing medical monitoring by a GP and nutrition support with a Dietitian is also important.

For adults, CBT has been shown to be the most effective for treatment of BED. 'Guided self-help' has also been shown to be effective.

For children and adolescents, both Family Based Treatment and CBT have research to support their use with BED.

Hospital-based treatment may be required if the symptoms are very severe or if there are any medical complications that need immediate treatment.

For any person with BED, it is important to seek care from an empathetic and skilled GP who can remain involved in your care throughout treatment and can monitor your physical health. A trained and skilled community clinician will almost always be needed to deliver evidence based treatment.

**Anyone experiencing this pattern of eating, no matter how infrequent, should seek treatment as it can be resolved.**