

# Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

## What is Binge Eating Disorder (BED)?

Binge Eating Disorder is a serious mental illness characterised by regular episodes of binge eating.

A person with Binge Eating Disorder will not use compensatory behaviours, such as self-induced vomiting or over-exercising after binge eating.

Many people with Binge Eating Disorder are overweight or obese.

## What is binge eating?

Binge eating involves two key features:

- Eating a very large amount of food within a relatively short period of time (e.g. within two hours)
- Feeling a sense of loss of control while eating (e.g. feeling unable to stop yourself from eating)

Binge Eating Disorder can occur in people of all ages and genders, across all socio-economic groups, and from any cultural background. Equal numbers of males and females experience Binge Eating Disorder.

## Defining Binge Eating Disorder:

### Frequent episodes of binge eating

A person with Binge Eating Disorder will repeatedly engage in binge eating episodes where they eat a large amount of food in a short period of time. During these episodes they will feel a loss of control over their eating and may not be able to stop even if they want to.

### Eating habits

A person with Binge Eating Disorder will often have a range of identifiable eating habits. These can include eating very quickly, eating when they are not physically hungry and continuing to eat even when they are full, to the point that they feel uncomfortable.

### Feelings around food

Feelings of guilt and shame are highly prevalent in people with Binge Eating Disorder. People with Binge Eating Disorder often feel guilty or ashamed about the amount, and the way they eat during a binge eating episode. Binge eating often occurs at times of



stress, anger, boredom or distress. At such times, binge eating is used as a way to cope with challenging emotions.

## **Behaviours around food**

Because of their feelings around food, people with Binge Eating Disorder are often very secretive about their eating habits and choose to eat alone.

## **What are the warning signs of Binge Eating Disorder?**

Having awareness about Binge Eating Disorder and its warning signs and symptoms can make a marked difference to the severity and duration of the illness. Seeking help at the first warning sign is much more effective than waiting until the illness is in full swing. If you or someone you know is exhibiting some or a combination of these signs it is vital to seek help and support as soon as possible.

The warning signs of Binge Eating Disorder can be physical, psychological and behavioural. It is possible for someone with Binge Eating Disorder to display a combination of these symptoms.

### **Physical signs:**

- Feeling tired and not sleeping well
- Feeling bloated, constipated or developing intolerances to food

### **Psychological Signs:**

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

### **Behavioural Signs:**

- Evidence of binge eating (e.g. disappearance and/or hoarding of food)
- Secretive behaviour relating to food (e.g. hiding food and food wrappers around the house)
- 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)
- Self harm, substance abuse or suicide attempts



## What are the risks associated with Binge Eating Disorder?

The risks associated with Binge Eating Disorder are severe. People with Binge Eating Disorder may experience:

- Osteoarthritis - a painful form of degenerative arthritis in which a person's joints degrade in quality and can lead to loss of cartilage
- Chronic kidney problems or kidney failure
- High blood pressure and/or high cholesterol leading to increased risk of stroke, diabetes and heart disease

## Is recovery possible?

Yes. It is possible to recover from Binge Eating Disorder, even if you have been living with the illness for many years.

The path to recovery can be very challenging but it can also shed light on what contributes to binge eating, low self-esteem, negative body image and how to minimise relapse. Through the process of recovery a person with Binge Eating Disorder can learn how to replace their unhealthy eating habits with more helpful coping strategies.

With the right team and a high level of personal commitment, recovery is an achievable goal. Treatments for Binge Eating Disorder are available; seek help from a professional with specialised knowledge in eating disorders.

## Getting help

If you suspect that you or someone you know has Binge Eating Disorder, it is important to seek help immediately. The earlier you seek help the closer you are to recovery. While your GP may not be a specialist in eating disorders, they are a good 'first base.' A GP can provide a referral to a practitioner with specialised knowledge in health, nutrition and eating disorders.

**To find help in your local area go to [www.nedc.com.au/helplines](http://www.nedc.com.au/helplines)**

The NEDC constantly reviews research evidence on eating disorders. Recent research can be found at [www.nedc.com.au/research-resources](http://www.nedc.com.au/research-resources) Each of the publications of the NEDC also draw on an extensive review of evidence and expert opinion. NEDC publications and their bibliographies can be found at [www.nedc.com.au/nedc-publications](http://www.nedc.com.au/nedc-publications) In addition to NEDC publications, this fact sheet has drawn on other sources of information which can be found at [www.nedc.com.au/fact-sheet-bibliography](http://www.nedc.com.au/fact-sheet-bibliography)

