

Binge eating disorder is a severe, life-threatening disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of compulsive overeating or binge eating. In binge eating disorder, the purging to prevent weight gain that is characteristic of bulimia nervosa is absent.

Behavioral Characteristics:

- Recurrent episodes of binge eating
- Eating much more rapidly than normal
- A sense of lack of control over eating during binge episodes
- Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
- Hoarding food
- Hiding food and eating in secret; e.g., eating alone or in the car, hiding wrappers
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating throughout the day with no planned mealtimes

Emotional and Mental Characteristics:

- Feelings of disgust, guilt, or depression during and after overeating
- Binge eating often triggered by uncomfortable feelings such as anger, anxiety, or shame
- Binge eating used as a means of relieving tension, or to “numb” feelings
- Rigid, inflexible “all or nothing” thinking
- Strong need to be in control
- Difficulty expressing feelings and needs
- Perfectionistic
- Works hard to please others
- Avoids conflict, tries to “keep the peace”
- Disgust about body size, often teased about their body while growing up

Emotional and Mental Characteristics (continued):

- Feelings of worthlessness
- Social isolation
- Depression
- Moodiness and irritability

Physical Characteristics:

- Heart and blood pressure problems
- Joint problems
- Abnormal blood-sugar levels
- Fatigue
- Difficulty walking or engaging in physical activities

(Compiled by Tom Shiltz, MS, CADCIII, Rogers Memorial Hospital, Oconomowoc, WI. Reprinted with permission. Source: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition. American Psychiatric Association, 1994.)