



Extension FactSheet

Family and Consumer Sciences, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210

EATING DISORDERS AWARENESS

Binge Eating Disorder

Deborah L. Angell, Extension Agent,
Family and Consumer Sciences, Huron County

Binge eating disorder was not recognized as a separate and distinct eating disorder until 1994. It is similar to bulimia nervosa in that individuals with this eating disorder binge or eat large amounts of food, uncontrollably in a short period of time, but they do not engage in purging or other behaviors to rid their body of the excess calories consumed during the binge. Binge eating disorder is diagnosed in normal or overweight individuals. They experience a marked distress over their eating behavior due to a feeling of shame.

It is not known how common this eating disorder is, but studies suggest that between 25 and 50 percent of all obese people binge eat. This condition could include many of the patients who go to weight control clinics. This indicates that this eating disorder could be fairly common. Studies also suggest that individuals with binge eating disorder have difficulties with impulse control in other areas of their lives, as well as using food to “medicate” or as a form of coping skills.

Characteristics of binge eating disorder include:

- Binge episodes where one eats a large amount of food (larger than most people would eat in a similar period of time under similar circumstances) in a short period of time (within 2 hours for example).
- A sense of lack of control during the binge episode (feeling that one cannot stop eating or control how much one is eating).

- Eating much faster than normal.
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full.
- Eating large amounts of food when not feeling hungry.
- Eating alone to avoid being embarrassed about how much one is eating.
- Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty after overeating.
- Significant distress is felt regarding binge eating.

Treatment similar to what is effective for bulimia nervosa is used for binge eating disorder. These people turn to food to find comfort for failing to be successful in achieving supportive interactions with other people. Treatment of binge eating disorder is complex and should begin with selecting a mental health professional with experience in treating eating disorders. The eating disorder is often a symptom of other underlying problems, such as abuse. Treatment must address the underlying issues as well as the disordered eating behaviors. It should be individualized and may include individual psychotherapy, family therapy, marital/couples therapy, group therapy, support groups, and nutritional counseling. Treatment with antidepressant medication has proven effective with some individuals; however, a combination of medication and therapy is recommended. Treatment may be outpatient, intensive day treatment (partial hospitalization for 7 to 10 hours daily), or inpatient hospitalization.

Resources

Mental Health Net, (1999) <<http://www.mentalhelp.net/disorders/sx3.htm>>.

National Eating Disorders Organization. (1997). *Overview of eating disorders: Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and related disorders*.

Waller, D. (1996). Eating Disorders, *Child and adolescent psychiatry*. St. Louis, MO: Mosby-Year Book, Inc.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Adm. and Director, OSU Extension

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