

Bulimia Nervosa

What is bulimia?

Bulimia nervosa is an eating disorder. It is characterized by binge eating (eating large amounts of food in a short time) followed by self-induced vomiting and/or use of laxatives.

Although most bulimics have a normal weight, they feel a lack of control over their eating behavior. After bingeing, they induce vomiting or use laxatives or diuretics because they are fearful of becoming overweight. They often feel that their lives are controlled by conflicts about eating. Although the disorder can affect men, most people with bulimia nervosa are female adolescents or young women.

How does it occur?

The exact cause of bulimia nervosa is not known. Some researchers believe that eating disorders may be related to malfunctioning of the part(s) of the brain regulating mood and appetite.

Factors that increase the risk of developing bulimia nervosa include:

- a family history of bulimia nervosa or eating disorders
- a family or personal history of mood disorders, such as major [depression](#) or [bipolar disorder](#) (manic depression).

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of bulimia include:

- repeated episodes of binge eating
- strict dieting or fasting
- repeated weight loss and gain of more than 10 pounds
- dehydration
- weakness
- depression and guilt after binge eating
- damaged teeth from gastric acid contained in vomit
- swollen cheeks from repeated vomiting
- preoccupation with being thin
- depressed or anxious mood.

How is it diagnosed?

The health care provider takes a medical history and does a physical exam. He or she will ask about your eating patterns, looking for such behavior as:

- repeated episodes of binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting or use of laxatives
- alternate bingeing and fasting
- secret eating and bingeing
- exercising excessively to prevent weight gain.

How is it treated?

If you have bulimia, you must recognize that you are suffering from a dangerous disorder. Treatment involves regulation of new eating habits. Your health care provider may recommend psychotherapy and family counseling and may prescribe medication used for mood disorders, such as antidepressants or mood stabilizers.

How long will the effects last?

The risk of relapse exists for years after treatment ends. Without treatment, you may become depressed and suicidal.

How can I take care of myself?

- Eat well-balanced, nutritious meals.
- Schedule meals regularly, but not too rigidly. Avoid irregular eating habits and avoid fasting.
- Take vitamin and mineral supplements.
- Avoid using laxatives and diuretics.
- Seek professional help if you need to lose weight so you can lose weight slowly and to a reasonable level.
- Exercise regularly and in moderation.

What can be done to help prevent bulimia?

Many bulimics do not feel good about themselves. You can raise your self-esteem and thus prevent or minimize bulimia if you:

- Try to resolve areas of conflict in your life.
- Try to achieve a balance of work, social activities, recreation, rest, and exercise in your life.
- Create a support group of good friends.
- Keep a positive outlook on life.
- Stop judging yourself and others.

The [Student Counseling and Resource Services](#) (SCRS) staff, as well as the Student Care Center (SCC) providers can also help you in talking about your eating concerns. To make an appointment with a provider, call SCRS at 702-9800 or SCC at 702-4156.