

What is Bulimia?

Bulimia is an eating disorder that is characterised by getting caught in a cycle of eating large quantities of food in a short period of time ('binge eating'), and then vomiting, taking laxatives and diuretics ('purging'), or excessive exercising and fasting, as attempts to prevent weight gain.

People with bulimia usually hide their behavior from others, and often have a normal weight.



Development of bulimia

Certain factors can enhance the risk of developing anorexia. However, it is important to note that these factors do not mean that any eating disorder will surely be developed.

- Depression
- Trauma
- Dieting
- Abuse
- Low self-esteem
- Substance misuse in the family
- Transitions
- History of eating disorders in family



Symptoms

Feeling very tense or anxious

Dramatic changes in weight

Abdominal pain and bloating

A sore throat

Behaving secretive

Preoccupation with food

Social withdrawal

Irritability

Avoiding social gatherings
when there is food

A puffy face

Exercising excessively

Fasting

Bingeing and self-induced vomiting

Fatigue

Who can develop bulimia?

Anyone can develop bulimia. However, it is more common in women. A person can develop bulimia for any number of reasons, and there is usually an accumulation of 'risk factors' that lead to its development.

Is there a treatment for bulimia?

Recovering from bulimia is difficult, but possible. It is important to get help when needed as a person's life might be at risk. Treatment for bulimia is done using a team approach - it includes doctors, mental health professionals, and dietitians.

If someone's life is in immediate danger or they have developed serious health complications, hospitalisation may be needed. These include:

- being very underweight
- problems with your heart
- being under 18 and your doctors believing you don't have enough support at home
- doctors being concerned that you might harm yourself or are at risk of suicide

Therapy with qualified mental health professionals can be very beneficial in the treatment of bulimia:

Family Therapy

Systemic family therapy is the most recommended treatment for adolescents with bulimia. This approach requires the family coming together and working together towards recovery.

Individual Therapy

Adults can attend individual therapy as a part of their treatment. The main goals are to normalize eating patterns and behaviors, and to work on beliefs and thoughts that maintain unhealthy behaviours.