

# Overcoming Binge Eating For Dummies



From *Overcoming Binge Eating For Dummies* by Jennie Kramer, MSW, LCSW and Marjorie Nolan Cohn, MS, RD, CDN, ACSMHFS

If you're facing up to binge eating disorder (BED) or any disordered eating, adopting healthy eating habits and finding ways to outlast those urges to binge is key. Knowing the health risks you face may help motivate you to change your behavior. Your family and loved ones can play a key role in your recovery and can benefit from their own tips on coping.

## 10 Eating-Healthy Tips for Binge Eaters

Healthy eating is a key step toward overcoming binge eating disorder, or BED. Following healthy eating tips can help you look at food and eating as healthy and pleasurable without the negative feelings bingeing evokes.

- Check in with your body's hunger and fullness signals. Figuring out how to assess your hunger and fullness takes practice, but you begin by noticing how your body feels before, during, and after a meal. After some practice, you'll be able to distinguish between hunger and fullness and to recognize how much food you need to satiate your hunger. For example, if you still feel hungry after a meal, wait 15 to 20 minutes and distract yourself with another activity. If you're truly hungry, you will still be hungry after 20 minutes has passed.
- Set yourself up for success by starting slowly and by focusing on making realistic changes toward healthier eating over time. Quick fixes haven't worked up until now and still won't.
- Remember that it's not just about what you eat, but how you eat it. Focus on slowing down, chewing your food, and enjoying mealtimes. This is mindfulness. You deserve to enjoy your meals – not the book, computer screen, TV, or other distraction with which you share it. Then your body doesn't even register or remember that you ate.
- Focus on variety. Aim to have three or more different food groups at each meal and snack.
- Eat breakfast every day within an hour of waking to support healthy blood sugar throughout the day. Don't think that by skipping breakfast you'll save calories for later. Nothing could be further from the truth. Without a wholesome breakfast, you'll set yourself up for intense hunger later.
- Healthy eating starts with healthy shopping. Make sure your kitchen's filled with the best foods for you by making and following a grocery shopping list. Don't shop when you're hungry!



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- Plan to reduce, not eliminate, trigger foods. Completely cutting out certain foods often backfires, so plan to have those foods, if that's what you want, but in moderation and by saying to yourself, "There's always enough — this is not the last time I can have this. There's always enough."
- Think about what you can add to your meal plan, not what you should take away. Variety and moderation are key.
- Pay attention to what foods and combinations of foods most satisfy you. Notice the word "satisfy." Satiety is a lovely and grounded feeling; eating until you feel stuffed is not.
- Keep a food journal. Food journals aren't just useful when you're struggling with food or bingeing. Journaling's a tool you can use anytime, anywhere to increase overall healthy eating.

## Facing the Health Risks of Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

If you suffer from binge eating disorder, if you compulsively overeat, or if you eat as a reaction to emotional turmoil, your eating habits can lead to short- and long-term health risks.

### Short-term risks include:

- Joint/body aches and pain
- Increased blood pressure
- Acid reflux or heartburn
- Frequent headaches
- Digestive upset such as nausea, diarrhea, gas, bloating, and/or constipation
- Insomnia
- Physical discomfort when moving around
- Depression and other mood dysregulation
- Hypoglycemia leading to pre-diabetes

### In the long run, disordered overeating may lead to:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Gallbladder disease or gallstones
- Herniated discs
- Arthritis/osteoarthritis
- Gout
- Poor wound healing
- Hiatal hernia
- Sleep apnea or other serious breathing difficulties
- Certain types of cancers including cancer of the uterus, cervix, ovaries, breast, colon, rectum, and prostate
- Chronically high blood pressure and/or stroke
- Heart disease of many different kinds
- Menstrual problems/possible infertility
- Decreased mobility, joint pain, and/or swelling
- Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- Fatigue/other sleep difficulties
- High cholesterol and other blood lipid levels

## How to Help Someone with Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

Loving someone who has binge eating disorder, or BED, can be challenging. You want to be supportive, but being overly involved is counterproductive. These tips can help you find ways to be engaged without feeling overwhelmed:

- **Encourage her to get professional help.** The longer BED goes untreated, the more difficult it is to overcome, so urge your loved one to see a health professional right away.
- **Be a supportive listener.** Listen without judgment, this will show that you care. If your loved one slips up and binges on the road to recovery, remind him that it doesn't mean he can't get better.
- **Be supportive not berating.** Aim for positive comments only. Binge eaters feel bad enough about themselves already; using negative language only works against recovery efforts. By being optimistic and stating how much you care, you help in a constructive way.
- **Avoid insults, lectures, or guilt trips.** Lecturing, getting frustrated, or issuing ultimatums to a binge eater generally only increases stress and makes the situation worse. Instead, make it clear that you care about the binge eater's health and happiness and you'll continue to be there throughout the recovery process.
- **Lead by example.** By eating healthily, exercising, and managing stress without food you are indirectly helping your loved one. Binge eaters (just like all people with eating disorders) need healthy examples. By being a healthy person in both mind and body, you're supporting her recovery.
- **Don't be the food police.** One thing that's well-intended but *never* helpful is monitoring what someone eats. Being told what to eat, how much to eat, being watched while eating, or hiding, limiting, or commenting on food choices only perpetuates the problem and adds layers of shame and guilt. It doesn't add structure — it adds criticism, which only echoes that which is already always playing in the mind of the binge eater. Resist the urge to monitor, comment, or offer advice about eating. You can show your love in other ways.
- **Take care of yourself.** Know when to seek advice for yourself from a counselor or health professional. Helping someone deal with BED can be stressful, and having your own support system in place helps you help your loved one.
- **Don't focus on weight loss.** Asking "how much weight did you lose?" or "how much do you want to lose?" is a natural question, but weight loss isn't the point of treatment and may prevent your loved one from coming to you if she thinks that's the only measure of her progress.
- **Don't work harder than the binge eater on his recovery.** The binge eater in your life needs to be doing most of the work and driving the process of recovery. It's not that you shouldn't help, but if you find yourself doing all the grocery shopping, keeping a calendar of treatment appointments, or having to cajole him to go to the appointments, it's time to reevaluate. You probably have great intentions, but true recovery from binge eating requires that the binge eater herself find a reason to move forward and make progress.

## 10 Things to Do Instead of Bingeing

In order to interrupt any addiction, and to overcome binge eating disorder (BED) in particular, you have to find ways to get through periods of temptation and find alternatives to the unhealthy behavior. Try these tips when you feel the urge to binge:

- **Set a timer and postpone the binge for 15 minutes.** Distract yourself with television, music, knitting, reading, or anything else that fully engages you. Hopefully by delaying the binge, you can prevent it altogether.
- **Reach out to someone you trust.** Call a friend or family member — someone you trust — to talk about what's bothering you.
- **Take a walk.** Just move your body for 15 minutes and give yourself a chance to clear your head.
- **Write about what's bothering you.** Keep a journal close by so you can put your thoughts and feelings onto paper if you feel the urge to binge. Don't edit yourself — just download it all from brain and heart to paper.
- **Breathe deeply.** Inhale deeply as you count to six. Hold the breath for another count of six, and blow it out for six. Repeat four to six times or for up to ten minutes.
- **Make a containment box.** Write down your thoughts and place them in the box. Bring them to your next session with your therapist and don't take them out until then.
- **Use art to express yourself.** Draw or paint how you're feeling. Be as expressive as you can be. You may want to bring what you have created to your next therapy session.
- **Accomplish a concrete task.** Balance your checkbook or reorganize drawers or a closet. Anything that refocuses your attention and allows you to do something productive.
- **Brush and floss your teeth.** As simple as this sounds, taking care of your oral hygiene can help decrease the oral fixation that's so often a part of bingeing.
- **Make a list of at least five ways bingeing hurts you.** Include both physical and emotional effects, and be specific. A specific list can help to combat the rationalization you may be making for why it's okay to binge.

### About the Authors

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