

BULIMIA NERVOSA DEFINED

Bulimia is defined as recurrent episodes of binge eating. An episode of binge eating is characterized by both of the following:

- 1.) Eating, in a discrete period of time, an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances
- 2.) A sense of lack of control over eating during the episode (ie.. a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how much one is eating.)

The individual with Bulimia has recurrent inappropriate compensatory behavior in order to prevent weight gain, such as self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications, fasting; or excessive exercise.

The binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behaviors both occur on average, at least twice a week for three months. Self-evaluation is unduly influenced by body shape and weight.

There are two types of Bulimia, Purging and Non-Purging types. The purging type of Bulimia is when the individual regularly engages in self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas. The non-purging type is when the individual uses other inappropriate compensatory behaviors, such as fasting or excessive exercise, but has not regularly engaged in self-induced vomiting or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or enemas.

The signs/symptoms seen in individuals with Bulimia are as follows: binge eating, vomiting episodes, mood swings (seen very often), depression, immediate visits to the bathroom after they have eaten anything, self-critical, low self-worth or makes self-deprecating remarks, use of laxatives, weight changes, excessive exercise, and feelings that their self-worth is directly related to how much they currently weigh.

In individuals with Bulimia, the smallest amount of food can be considered a binge or the largest amount of food can be considered a binge. A hallmark symptom of Bulimia that is often seen in a therapeutic relationship is that they have a sense of feeling a complete loss of control over their situation while at the same time saying, "I have complete control over this" or "I can stop doing this at any time, it is not a problem." They feel like they have control over their life because they are controlling what goes in and out of their body. The person measures control through their weight and consequently their self-image related to how much they weigh.

Therapy/Counseling is almost always recommended for individuals with Bulimia in conjunction with nutritional counseling and medical treatment if needed.

References:

American Psychiatric Association (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM IV (4th ed., text, revision), Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

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