

Commentary

Nutrition and Binge-Eating Disorder: Strategies for Healthy Eating

Alena Dinara*

Department of Food and Nutrition, Medical University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland.

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Binge-eating disorder (BED) is the most common eating disorder in the United States, affecting millions of people. It can lead to a variety of health problems, including obesity, heart disease and depression. While many people with BED struggle with guilt and shame over their eating behaviours, it is important to recognize that binge-eating disorder is a treatable medical condition.

The impact of binge-eating disorder on physical and mental health

The binge-eating disorder can have serious consequences for both physical and mental health. Many of these effects are related to the frequent consumption of large quantities of food and the emotional distress that accompanies the disorder.

Obesity: Individuals with BED are at a higher risk of obesity due to the excessive calorie intake during binge episodes. Obesity, in turn, increases the risk of developing a range of health problems, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and certain types of cancer.

Metabolic syndrome: BED is associated with metabolic syndrome, a cluster of conditions that include high blood sugar, abnormal cholesterol levels and excess body fat around the waist. This syndrome significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Gastrointestinal issues: Frequent overeating can lead to digestive problems such as acid reflux, constipation and stomach discomfort. In severe cases, binge eating can stretch the stomach, causing intense physical discomfort and pain.

Sleep disorders: Individuals with BED may experience disrupted sleep patterns due to nighttime binge eating, physical discomfort, or emotional distress.

Depression and anxiety: Many people with BED also suffer from depression and anxiety. The emotional toll of binge-eating episodes, combined with feelings of guilt, shame and low self-esteem, can exacerbate these conditions.

Social isolation: BED can lead to social withdrawal and isolation, as individuals may avoid social situations where food is

involved or fear judgment from others. This isolation can further worsen feelings of loneliness and depression.

Body image issues: People with BED often struggle with body dissatisfaction and a distorted body image. This can lead to a negative self-perception and further fuel the cycle of binge eating.

Diagnosis of binge-eating disorder

Binge-eating disorder is typically diagnosed by a mental health professional through a comprehensive evaluation of the individual's eating behaviours, emotional state and medical history. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) provides specific criteria for diagnosing BED.

Recurrent episodes of binge eating: The individual engages in episodes of binge eating at least once a week for three months.

Loss of control: During binge episodes, the person feels a lack of control over their eating behaviour.

Distress about binge eating: The individual experiences significant distress, guilt, or shame related to their binge-eating episodes.

No compensatory behaviours: Unlike bulimia nervosa, individuals with BED do not engage in purging, excessive exercise, or other compensatory behaviours after binge eating.

Treatment for binge-eating disorder

Binge-eating disorder is treatable and with the right support, individuals can recover and lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. Treatment typically involves a combination of psychotherapy, medication and lifestyle changes.

Psychotherapy

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): CBT is one of the most effective treatments for BED. It helps individuals identify and change the negative thought patterns and behaviours that contribute to binge eating. CBT also teaches coping skills for managing stress and emotions without turning to food.

*Corresponding author. Alena Dinara, Email: dinara@gmail.com

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT): DBT is another therapeutic approach that can be helpful for individuals with BED. It focuses on improving emotional regulation and developing healthy coping mechanisms to manage distress.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT): IPT addresses interpersonal issues and relationship dynamics that may contribute to binge eating. By improving communication and emotional expression, IPT helps individuals build healthier relationships and reduce emotional eating.

Medications

Certain medications, such as antidepressants or appetite suppressants, may be prescribed to help manage BED

symptoms, particularly if the individual is also struggling with depression or anxiety. In some cases, medications that regulate appetite or mood can reduce the frequency and severity of binge episodes.

Nutritional counselling

Working with a registered dietitian can help individuals with BED develop a healthier relationship with food. Nutritional counselling focuses on creating balanced, sustainable eating patterns and breaking the cycle of restrictive dieting and binge eating.