

**Bulimia Nervosa** is a serious potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by a cycle of bingeing followed by behaviors such as self-induced vomiting, laxative abuse, or excessive exercise designed to compensate for the effects of binge eating. The earlier bulimia nervosa is detected and treated the higher the chance of recovery.

## Symptoms

- Frequent episodes of consuming very large amounts of food followed by purging behaviors to prevent weight gain, such as self-induced vomiting, laxative/diuretic/diet pill abuse, excessive exercise, fasting.
- A feeling of being out of control during the binge-eating episodes.
- Self-esteem overly related to body image.

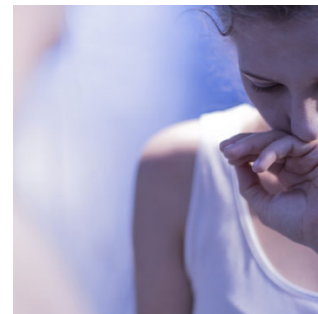
## Warning Signs

- Disappearance of large amounts of food in short periods of time.
- Evidence of purging behaviors, including frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, signs and/or smells of vomiting, presence of laxative or diuretic packages.
- Excessive, rigid exercise regimen despite weather, fatigue, illness, or injury, the compulsive need to “burn off” calories taken in.
- Unusual swelling of the cheeks or jaw area. Discoloration or staining of the teeth/ dental problems.
- Calluses on the back of the hands and knuckles from self-induced vomiting.
- Creation of schedules or rituals to make time for binge-and-purge sessions.
- Withdrawal from usual friends and activities.
- Behaviors and attitudes indicating that weight loss, dieting, and control of food are becoming primary concerns.
- Menstrual irregularities

## Health Consequences

Recurrent binge-and-purge cycles can damage the entire digestive system. Purging can lead to electrolyte and chemical imbalances in the body that adversely affect the heart and other major organs. Some of the health consequences of bulimia nervosa include:

- Electrolyte imbalances that can lead to irregular heartbeats and possibly heart failure. Electrolyte imbalance is caused by dehydration and loss of potassium and sodium from the body as a result of purging behaviors.
- Inflammation and possible rupture of the esophagus from frequent vomiting.
- Possible gastric rupture from binges.
- Tooth decay and staining from stomach acids released during frequent vomiting.
- Chronic irregular bowel movements and constipation as a result of laxative abuse.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Between 1.1% and 4.6% of females and 0.1% to 0.5% of males will develop bulimia

For people struggling with bulimia nervosa, body weight is typically within normal weight range; may be overweight.

Adapted from  
[nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://nationaleatingdisorders.org)

For more information and resources on bulimia nervosa and other eating disorders please refer to our “Eating Disorder Resources” fact sheet.

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