

BINGE EATING DISORDER: THE "OTHER" EATING DISORDER

By Dr. Ann Weitzman-Swain

Most people are familiar with the eating disorders anorexia and bulimia, however less is known about Binge Eating Disorder. Unfortunately, Binge Eating Disorder, is more prevalent and can be equally devastating. Although the disorder has been a challenge for men and women for many years, the disorder was only recently specifically included in the diagnostic manual used by mental health professionals to officially diagnose the problem. Previously, in the best of cases people with the disorder have diagnosed themselves as "compulsive eaters" or "food addicts," seeking help mostly from community support groups. In the worst of cases they have labeled themselves "yo yo dieters," "failed dieters," or worse. Because obesity is sometimes the result, they have been told by physicians to diet, have been put on medical weight loss programs and often referred for extreme weight loss surgeries. The problem is that extreme dieting or weight loss surgery does not address the problem of Binge Eating Disorder. If the symptoms of this disorder are present, in fact, these methods make the problem much worse.

Binge eating disorder is an emotional disorder. It is an eating disorder on a continuum with the other more well-known disorders of anorexia and bulimia. The people who suffer from the disorder know that it is emotional. They will describe periods of out of control eating, shame about eating and eating behavior that have little to do with the physical sensations of hunger. They describe not knowing why they turn to food when they are bored, angry, anxious or sad. They have often tried countless diets and have gained and lost the same many pounds over the years. They are men and women. They are all ages from young children to older adults. Some have struggled for 30 to 40 years with symptoms never knowing that they have a true eating disorder. They are relieved to learn that there is a name for their suffering. They are only sometimes obese and sometimes have health problems associated with obesity. They often suffer from anxiety and depression.

When someone with the disorder is diagnosed for the first time, they express a sense of relief because they know that something is very wrong and that focusing on the symptom of weight gain or repeatedly trying to lose weight using the latest popularized diet or by willpower alone is missing the nature of their problem. They

know that doing the same thing over and over, such as dieting, can't be the answer but they don't know what else to do. So they are often very discouraged and disappointed in themselves when they come for help. They tend to have little confidence in any program and have little hope for change.

At the Eating Disorders Recovery Center of Athens we strive to provide a supportive therapeutic environment that involves individual and/or group treatment to help people recover from the eating disorders including Binge Eating Disorder. We teach that in order to recover from an eating disorder a person must rid themselves of the rigid diet mentality that is so ingrained that keeps them stuck in a vicious cycle of body hate, deprivation and bingeing. We teach people skills for how to cope with emotions instead of over or under eating. We teach people that often eating disorder symptoms are a way that people avoid emotions that they don't know how to manage or problems that they don't know how to solve. They are relieved to know that there is a way out of the suffering even though it is a difficult journey.

Binge Eating Disorder and all of the eating disorders are emotional disorders. They require the help of a mental health professional specifically trained in the specialty. Help from other specialties may include a referral to a dietician, physician, and psychiatrist as part of the treatment plan. The recovery process is not easy but it is possible to fully recover from all of the eating disorders despite the common myth that one can never truly recover. With the right kind of support, expertise, and hard work it is possible to develop a healthy relationship with food and with yourself.



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