



National Alliance on Mental Illness

Courtney had just finished eating a box of cookies and a half-gallon of ice cream. She now felt a guilt that was indescribable. She couldn't stop herself from overeating, but now she felt an immediate urge to compensate for it. That night she spent four hours at the gym. This cycle continued throughout the week, as Courtney would eat a large amount of food, and then feel the necessity to purge herself using dangerous methods.

-----Bulimia Nervosa-----

Bulimia is an eating disorder marked by a pattern of binge-eating (consuming excessive large amounts of food within a short period of time) and recurrent inappropriate behavior to control one's weight, such as self-induced vomiting, abuse of laxatives, fasting, or excessive exercise.

Characteristics

- excessive eating of foods high in calories, followed by a feeling of guilt and subsequent attempts to rid the body of the calories through inappropriate means
- lack of control during eating binges
- to be diagnosed with bulimia, you must have had, on average, two binge-eating episodes per week for the last three months

Other Signs of Bulimia

- constant concern with food or weight to the exclusion of almost all other personal concerns
- excessive exercising
- erosion of dental enamel and scarring on the back of the hands
- some people experience swelling of the glands near the cheeks
- irregular menstrual periods
- decrease in sexual interest
- frequent complaints of sore throats and abdominal pain
- depressed mood

****Unlike anorexia, a person who is bulimic is usually within normal weight range****

What Causes Bulimia?

- social factors: susceptibility to the overall obsession in society with being thin, or overweight children entering adolescence and wanting to lose weight
- obesity during adolescence can also promote the development of the disorder
- biological factors: decreased levels of the neurotransmitters serotonin and norepinephrine may increase the risk of developing bulimia

NAMI on Campus –3803 N. Fairfax Drive., Ste. 100, Arlington, VA 22203, Ph: 703-524-7600, Email: namioncampus@nami.org,
Website: www.nami.org/FindSupport/NAMonCampus



Who Is at Risk?

- bulimia nervosa typically affects adolescents and college-aged students
- females are primarily at risk, but males may also develop bulimia

What Type of Treatment Is Available?

- group therapy is especially effective for college-aged and young adult women because of the understanding of other group members
- support groups enhance therapy and make it more effective, but cannot be used in place of treatment
- cognitive-behavioral therapy used to focus on self-monitoring of eating and purging behaviors and changing distorted thinking patterns
- nutritional counseling helps people to learn about proper eating and develop proper eating patterns
- medications are used to treat chemical imbalances in the body

****Treatment usually consists of more than one of these approaches; a comprehensive treatment plan involving a variety of experts is most effective****

Warning: Regular or heavy alcohol use can worsen most psychological states, such as anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, or eating problems. Alcohol can change the way a person feels in the short run; however, the overall effect only worsens a disorder. Marijuana and other drugs can have similar or more serious effects on the brain.

**For further help, you can call the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders Hotline: 847-831-3438 or visit www.anad.org
National Alliance on Mental Illness www.nami.org or 1800-950-NAMI
National Institute of Mental Health-www.nimh.nih.gov
National Eating Disorders Organization www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
Screening for Mental Health www.mentalhealth.org
American College Counseling Association www.collegecounseling.org
National Panhellenic Conference www.npcwomen.org
National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide (NOPCAS) www.nopcas.org
National Latino Behavioral Health Association www.nlbha.org
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association www.naapimha.org**

Updated January 2006

Reviewed by Ken Duckworth, MD, Medical Director, NAMI

Permission is granted for this fact sheet to be reproduced in its entirety, but the NAMI name, service mark, and contact information must be included.

NAMI on Campus –3803 N. Fairfax Drive., Ste. 100, Arlington, VA 22203, Ph: 703-524-7600, Email: namioncampus@nami.org,
Website: www.nami.org/FindSupport/NAMonCampus

