

What is Binge Eating?

Module 1 Further Reading

Beat Binge Eating Course with

Balance.

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Module 1:

What is Binge Eating?

Understanding exactly what binge eating is allows us to be better equipped in exploring, understanding and rewiring our behaviours around binge eating.

Defining Binge Eating

BEAT - the UK's leading eating disorder charity, define binge eating disorder (BED) as...

"...a serious mental illness where people eat very large quantities of food without feeling like they're in control of what they're doing. It can affect anyone of any age, gender, ethnicity or background, and evidence suggests it is more common than other eating disorders."

The control aspect of the definition is key and is further highlighted by the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases who suggest that the critical factor of a binge eating episode is the distinct feeling of loss of control at the time of the episode.

This is important to highlight given the subjective nature of control or, better put, feeling in control.

A binge may not necessarily look like a traditional binge on the surface; be it the amount of food, the type of food and or the situation and circumstance of the binge itself; which can make it difficult for those who are struggling with their eating behaviours to seek help if they don't fit a pre-conceived ideal of what a binge eater should look or act like.

That's why using control as an additional determining factor for whether an eating experience was or was not a binge can be useful; it allows the individual experiencing the episode to determine whether or not they feel they have experienced a binge or are experiencing routine binge eating behaviours, even if they don't fit society's ideals for what a binge eater or binge eating looks like.

Clinical definitions

The DSM-5, which is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders used by healthcare professionals around much of the world as the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders, has identified four primary criteria that have to be met for a binge eating disorder diagnosis;

1. You feel a sense of loss / lack of control when eating - often described by individuals who are dealing with these issues as dissociating or an "out of body" experience
2. Eating a relatively large amount of food in a short period of time (2 hours).
3. Marked psychological distress and feelings of shame, guilt, anger and resentment during and after an episode.
4. Having these episodes at least 2 days a week for 6 months or at least 1 day a week for 3 months

Traits of a Binge Eating Episode

These are the distinguishing traits of a binge eating episode. It's important to understand these and to be able to determine when you (or someone else) is experiencing emotional eating, overeating or binge eating.

Volume

Rapidly eating a large amount of food in a short time frame

Feeling

Feeling a sense of loss or loss of control when eating; "out of body" experience

Control

Loss of control may be the key distinguishing trait between emotional and overeating and a binge eating episode

Frequency

Having at least one binge a week for several months on end

Self-Talk

Feelings of shame, anger, guilt and more surround a binge eating episode