

# Weighing In: When Food Becomes Problematic

Rebecca A. Mowen, L.C.S.W., C.A.D.C., S.A.P., C.I.P. • Jane Walter, Med., L.P.C.

Eating disorders are not a fad, they are real and the consequences impact the person's physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Eating disorders affect ten to fifteen percent of all Americans. They affect people of all racial, gender, educational and socio-economic lines.

It is estimated that 20 million women and 10 million males suffer from a significant eating disorder some-time in their lifetime. Sixty-one percent of American adults are either overweight or obese. One out of every five US adults is classified as obese (BMI of 30 or greater). An estimated ten to fifteen percent of people with anorexia or bulimia are males.

**9.7%**

of polled dentists, spouses and family members have been diagnosed with an eating disorder

According to a 2015 ADA wellbeing survey, 9.7 percent of 2,122 of dentists, spouses and family members polled have been diagnosed with an eating disorder (2.5 percent Anorexia, 2 percent Bulimia and 5.2 percent Compulsive Overeating).

Eating disorders classified in the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) 5*, are: Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa and Binge Eating Disorder (B.E.D.)

**Anorexia Nervosa** disorder has an abnormal focus on food, a fear of gaining weight, maintaining low weight by over exercising or starving themselves. A distorted body image is hallmark to the disease, seeing themselves as fat when they are really thin.

**Bulimia Nervosa** is characterized by repeated episodes of uncontrolled eating followed by compensatory weight loss behaviors like self-induced vomiting, fasting, over exercising, or abuse of laxatives and or diuretics. They have a preoccupation with body and weight.

The ADA results for compulsive overeating were reported to be twice as high as for anorexia or bulimia.

For the purpose of this article we are going to focus on that statistic.

According to The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluations, 160 million Americans, nearly three quarters, are obese or overweight (obese = BMI equal or greater than 30; overweight = BMI greater than or equal to 25 and lower than 30). They found that in 2013, there were 78 million adults, thirty-two percent men, forty percent female and thirteen percent of American children suffering from obesity.

Food is a necessary part of life, however, when food becomes your coping mechanism it is difficult to gain control. Everywhere you look, your favorite food is there, with a secret sign that says "Eat Me". How many restaurants do you pass daily on your way to work? How often do you smell the food as you pass by a KFC? For most, the right choice is made most of the time, but for those suffering with B.E.D., it's not that easy.

B.E.D. is the closest diagnosis that correlates to compulsive overeating.

**Binge eating disorder** is a common eating disorder characterized by three key features:

- Frequent episodes of uncontrollable binge eating
- Feeling extremely distressed or upset during or after bingeing
- Unlike bulimia, there are no regular attempts to "make up" for the binges through vomiting, fasting, or over-exercising

**Behavioral symptoms** of binge eating and compulsive overeating:

- Inability to stop eating or control what you're eating
- Rapidly eating large amounts of food
- Eating even when you're full
- Hiding or stockpiling food to eat later in secret

- Eating normally around others, but gorging when you're alone
- Eating continuously throughout the day, with no planned mealtimes

**Emotional symptoms** of binge eating and compulsive overeating:

- Feeling stress or tension that is only relieved by eating
- Embarrassment over how much you're eating
- Feeling numb while bingeing — like you're not really there or you're on auto-pilot
- Never feeling satisfied, no matter how much you eat
- Feeling guilty, disgusted, or depressed after overeating
- Desperation to control weight and eating habits

## Do you have a binge eating disorder?

Do you feel out of control when you are eating?

Do you think about food all the time?

Do you eat in secret?

Do you eat until you are sick?

Do you eat to escape from worries, relive stress, or to comfort yourself?

Do you feel disgusted or ashamed after you eat?

Do you feel powerless to stop eating, even though you want to?

*The more "yes" answers you have, the more likely you have a binge eating disorder.*

Eating disorders, like other shame based diseases, keep people from getting help until the disease has progressed to chronic proportions. If you, your spouse, your family member or office team member are suffering or questioning, please reach out to your local well-being committee, therapist and/or physician for help.

If you do not meet diagnostic criteria for B.E.D., here are some tips to maintain a healthy weight. According to the National Weight Control Registry, over 10,000 people aged 18 and older have lost 30 or more pounds and maintained that weight loss for one year or longer.

### **The reported keys to their success are:**

Nutrition: Women ~1,300 kcal/day  
Men ~1,800 kcal/day

Consistent over week and year

Low variety in food groups

Behaviors: Seventy-eight percent eat breakfast everyday

Seventy-five percent weigh themselves at least once per week

Sixty-two percent watch less than ten hours of TV per week

Ninety percent exercise, on an average about one hour per day, and had approximately 11,000 steps per day

### **Treatment is available. Recovery is possible.**

Eating disorders are serious health conditions that can be both physically and emotionally destructive. People with eating disorders need to seek professional help. Early diagnosis and intervention may enhance recovery.

When you begin to notice that disordered eating habits are affecting your life, your happiness, and your ability to concentrate, it is important that you talk to somebody about what you're going through.

The ADA's Health and Wellness Program can connect you with the right professionals to get you on the road to recovery. Please contact **us at**

**dentalpractice@ada.org** or review the National Eating Disorders Association searchable [Treatment Provider Database](#) to find treatment options in your area.