

Are You an Emotional Overeater?

It's normal to occasionally overeat until feeling uncomfortably full. Who hasn't celebrated Thanksgiving Dinner or other special day and later regretted that second helping or extra dessert? But if you frequently consume large amounts of food while feeling your eating is out of control, something else might be going on.

All of us need ways of coping with the stresses of everyday living. Some ways of coping are positive (hobbies, social connections, spiritual activities, family, community, exercise, self-improvement), some are negative (mind altering substances, aggression, risky or unhealthy behaviors).

If you're frequently overeating as a way of coping with stress and other emotions, you could have Binge Eating Disorder (BED), sometimes called compulsive overeating. People with serious binge eating problems: feel their eating is out of control; eat large amounts of food even when not hungry; eat until physically uncomfortably full; often eat alone due to embarrassment; and, feel disgusted, guilty or depressed after overeating.

It's hard for overweight and obese people with untreated Binge Eating Disorder to lose weight and very difficult for them to keep it off (even after weight-loss surgery). This puts them at higher risk for diseases associated with obesity including diabetes, heart disease, stroke and many cancers. While 2% of the general population struggles with BED, about 15% of mildly obese people have the disorder and up to 50% of severely obese people are binge eaters.

People with BED tend to be more depressed than overweight people without binge eating problems. Even depression by itself can lead to emotional overeating because certain foods make people feel better, at least temporarily. There's a bit of a "chicken and egg" dilemma with depression and obesity. Do people overeat because they are depressed? Or, are obese people depressed because they are overweight? Or, are both true?

If you're an emotional overeater, it's important to know that you aren't alone. Get help from a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker experienced in obesity treatment if you think you have Binge Eating Disorder. It is difficult to control this disorder on your own. These same health care professionals can also help with

depression, whether or not it is accompanied by emotional overeating. Most people do well in treatment and can overcome binge eating and depression.

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