

Top Tips for Managing Binge Eating

Commit to Change

Change is hard. If you've tried and not been able to stop your binge eating in the past, you've probably questioned your ability to change and this can make change feel even more impossible and overwhelming. Regardless. Change is possible.

Sit down with a pen and paper and write down your reasons for wanting to change. When you're having a tough day and you're wavering from your goals, use this list to boost your motivation. Also make a list of other changes you've made in the past and think about what personal strengths helped you to achieve these changes. Doing this will help you remind yourself that you're capable of change.

Identify your Triggers

The first step in managing binge eating is identifying triggers. Keep a diary and record your triggers – remember triggers can be situational, cognitive, or emotional. Common triggers are: feeling upset, lonely, or bored; feeling hungry after restricting food intake throughout the day; or breaking a dietary rule. Once you know your triggers you can start to work towards eliminating them. For example, if feeling upset triggers your binge eating you can work towards learning alternative strategies to manage your feelings.

Set Realistic Dietary Goals

Make realistic changes to your diet – drastic changes tend to be unsustainable. Keep a food diary for a week and look at what you can change. Don't try to change everything at once – aim to stick to a meal plan 1 or 2 days per week at first and then increase the number of days as you experience success.

As a general rule, eat 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day. It might feel like skipping meals will help you to lose weight, but it usually has the opposite effect. Skipping meals leads to intense hunger which can trigger binge eating.

Manage Urges

Urges are like any of our other emotions, at their peak they can be intense, but they always pass. Urges might *feel* like they're going to hang around for forever, but they won't. To prove this, practice waiting your urges out. To begin with start with small blocks of time – see if you can delay acting on your urge by 5-minutes. If at the end of 5-minutes it feels like you can wait it out for another 5-minutes, wait another 5-minutes. Continue doing this until the urge passes.

If you clock watch 5-minutes will feel like 5-hours. Make a list of things you can do to keep busy and work through your list while you're waiting out your urge – you might surprise yourself.

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Binge Eating

Everyone eats more than they should every now and then, but binge eating is a term used to describe compulsive over-eating that occurs on a regular basis.

Binge eating involves two key features:

- Eating a very large amount of food within a relatively short period of time (two hours)
- Feeling out of control while eating

Other symptoms related to binge eating are:

- Eating until you feel physically uncomfortable
- Eating even when you're not hungry
- Relying on eating to manage stress and other negative emotions
- Eating rapidly
- Eating in secret
- Feeling disgusting, depressed, or guilty after a binge

Why someone starts binge eating will differ from person to person, but common risk factors are:

- Strict dieting
- Body image dissatisfaction
- Low self-esteem
- An impulsive personality
- An all or nothing thinking style
- A lack of skills to cope with stress, low mood, or boredom.

This tips sheet covers basic strategies for managing binge eating. If you find it hard to break the cycle, seek advice from a clinical psychologist.