

Recovering from Binge Eating Disorder

Nurturing Hope in Recovery



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01 About binge eating disorder.

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is a complex mental illness, but it is treatable and with the right support, **recovery is possible**.

It is important to recognise that **there is no “one way” to have BED**. As such, one person’s experience of BED will look different to another’s. However, there are shared characteristics and behavioural patterns that can help with diagnosis and treatment planning, these include:

- Eating uncontrollably (bingeing) and/or fear of eating uncontrollably
- Secretive eating and isolation
- Petty theft to get hold of food to binge on
- Acts of self-disgust and self-harm
- Perfectionism
- Depression, and other co-occurring conditions such as OCD and anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Preoccupation with body image and appearance.



“I’d forgotten what normal eating looked like...I had spent so long starving myself or gorging that I’d forgotten what that middle ground looked like.” – Richard, Client

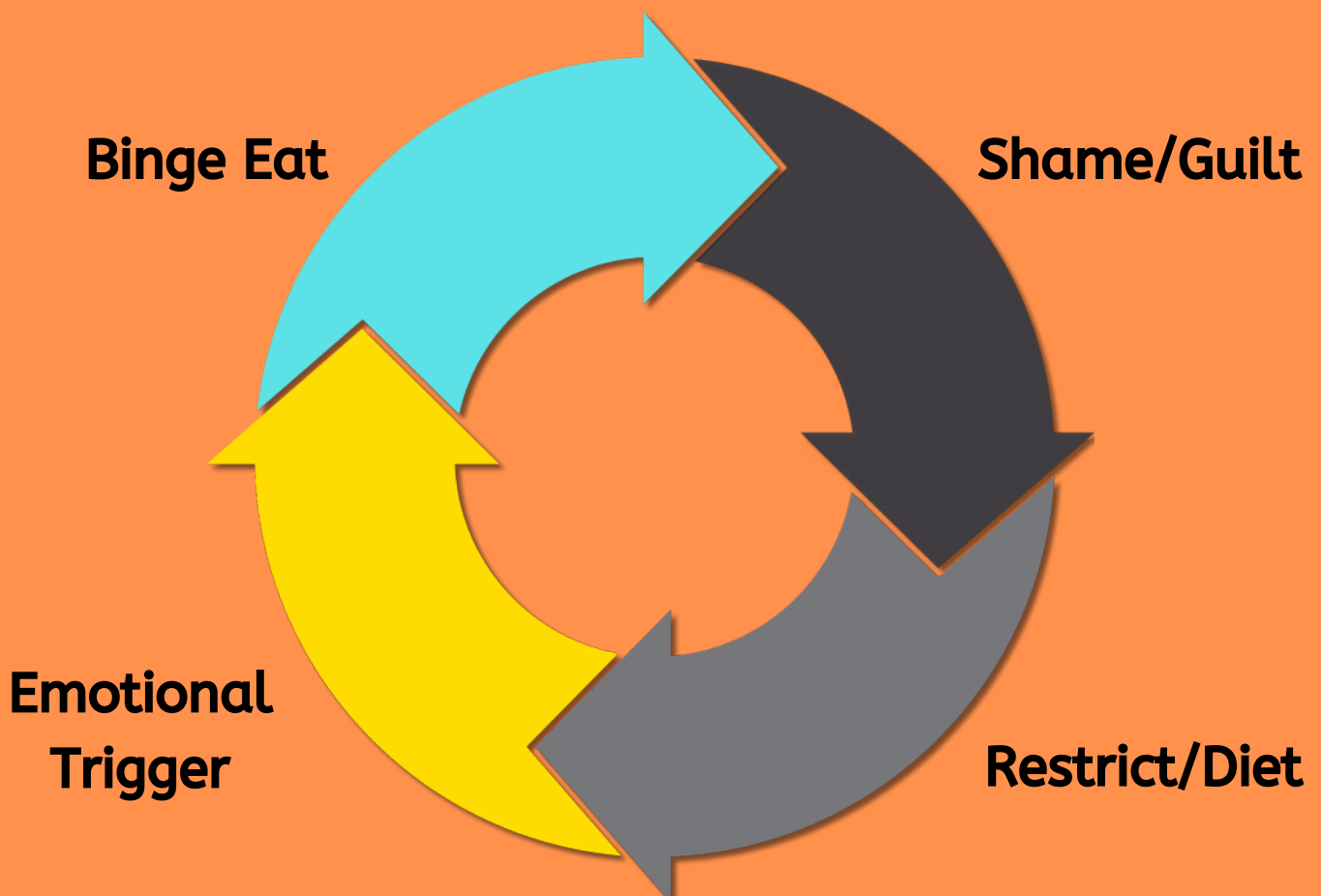
02 The cycle of bingeing and restricting.

Typically, people with binge eating disorder will struggle to regulate their eating habits and relationship to food. They may swing between eating too much (bingeing) and then compensating for a binge by severely restricting their food intake or dieting.

It is common for people to feel **trapped within a cycle of bingeing and restricting** - it can feel extremely out of control and frenetic, and there can be a lot of **shame** associated with bingeing, causing people to **isolate** and become more **secretive** around food and their emotional state.

It might be hard to distinguish between binge eating disorder and overeating, as to occasionally overeat is part of normal behaviour with food. Yet people with binge eating disorder often talk of going into a trance-like state when they binge and can feel completely out of control.

It is important to note that there is no pleasure or enjoyment involved with bingeing, rather, it is a **compulsive** act and often **a response to emotional distress**.



BED is not overeating.

This is one of the most common myths about binge eating disorder.

Many people use the term 'binge' to describe more normative behaviour, such as overeating during Christmas time or binge-watching Netflix during lockdown.

Yet, binge eating is more than just overeating - which we all do on occasion. If someone was to indulge a little bit more on their birthday or over a 'normal' meal this does not mean that they have an eating disorder.

One of the biggest differences between the two is that a person suffering from binge eating disorder often feels like they are unable to control their urges to eat and this can be an emotional response and a self-soothing behaviour. Binge eating disorder has the following symptoms which differentiate it from over-eating...

BED symptoms that separate it from overeating:

- **Feeling out of control when eating (feeling as though one cannot stop or control how much one is eating)**
- **Eating alone in order to prevent feelings of shame or embarrassment**
- **Consuming food in a fast and hurried way**
- **Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty afterwards**



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And despite all the food talk, eating disorders are not about food. Therefore, BED is also not about food.

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Eating disorders are about the feelings, not about the food.

The symbolic act of bingeing can be understood as an attempt to negate or interrupt overwhelming negative emotions. In this way, food can be used to soothe emotional distress.

Identifying the triggers of distress is a big part of the recovery journey.

Understanding the role that BED plays in our life needs to be looked at within psychotherapy, whilst concurrently following a well-balanced meal plan.

— Orri Blog

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Breaking the cycle of binge eating disorder.

Tips from the Orri team

Recognise your triggers.

You might want to start your journey by recognising the experiences and events that precede a binge, i.e. the triggers.

Perhaps it's a certain relationship, dynamic, social situation, or challenging experience - or a mix of many different things.

If you're aware of situations or activities that trigger a binge episode, you can then work to find healthy and compassionate ways to respond to these situations that don't involve food/bingeing.

Gradual, gentle awareness can help us to break out of the cycle.

Activity:

Make a note of when and where you feel your body starting to respond to stress, anxiety or overwhelm.

Note how your mind may go towards food or bingeing. Pause, and consider how you can respond lovingly to those challenging times. If this is challenging, reach out to a specialist or a loved one for additional support.

During times of distress, you may notice that your go-to response is to binge. At the time, we may completely lose ourselves in that experience. However, if we give ourselves time to learn more about our experience in these situations, we may find that underneath the compulsion is an underlying fear or need that is being sorely neglected.



Give overwhelming feelings room to breathe.

People with eating disorders can often struggle to tolerate uncomfortable or overwhelming emotions and feelings, such as anxiety, stress or anger.

Give yourself permission to investigate what's going on for you - no matter how 'negative' the emotions may seem to be. Is there something you're experiencing at home, in friendships or in yourself that you're finding overwhelming?

Eating disorders are akin to escapism, they help you to “leave” overwhelming experiences by distracting your attention, but this simply leaves the overwhelming experience bubbling underneath the surface until it either escapes in a less controlled, covert way (such as a binge), or until it is eventually healed through healthy and compassionate expression.



Nurture self-compassion.

Step 1

In a safe space - perhaps your bedroom or an empty room - write down everything you're feeling and thinking, no matter how "shameful" or embarrassing.

Give your anxiety room to breathe and dissipate - you don't need to hold onto anything that isn't serving you.

Step 2

Consider how a friend may respond to these anxieties if you said them out loud.

What would a loving person say to you? Thinking like this invites and cultivates a loving internal voice to counter the strength of the critical voice.

Write the responses down. Hold onto them.



People with eating disorders often struggle with a highly critical inner dialogue. By practicing writing from the perspective of a loved one - such as a friend - we can remind ourselves of the other ways we can speak to ourselves.

Shift perspective.

Be mindful of the content and messages you're absorbing day-to-day and how these may be impacting your relationship to your self and food.

Social media can play a big part in this. Platforms are driven by positive engagements, so often people's posts will strive to reinforce the positive and we aren't able to see the full picture.

Activity:

Conduct a social media "review" to clear out anything that causes you to reflect negatively on yourself – **it is okay to follow accounts that encourage you to love yourself and it's okay to unfollow (or "mute") people who cause the opposite.** This is your life.

When it comes to body image and looking at our physical appearance, we often look and see what we 'want' to see as opposed to the reality. This means that if we believe we are unattractive in one way or another, we will look for things to reinforce and validate that message (this is called "confirmation bias").

We can tackle this by **being aware that this is our pattern of thinking.** Once we understand that it's become ingrained enough to feel like our reality, we can begin to **question it and reverse it.**

***"Body shaming can be a coping mechanism...a way that we try to take control and problem-solve the complex emotions we may be feeling."** - Kerrie, CEO*



Expand your internal dialogue about yourself.

When we are living with an eating disorder, it can feel like our whole identity is wrapped around our behaviours and experience with food.

Remember that **you are not your eating disorder**. The eating disorder is simply a chapter in your life and something that you are **going** through.

Remember who you are underneath the illness. These questions may support you in this process:



What am I going to do to make sure I stay committed to loving me?

What am I thankful for?

What does self-love mean to me?

What would I like to learn from scratch?

Who do I love, and who do I know loves me back?

What makes me laugh?

What's one way I can celebrate my body every day?

What do I love and value about myself?

What brings me joy?

What fulfills me?

What are my favorite ways to move my body?

What is one thing my body helped me do last in the last few days?



Redefine your relationship to food.

Thinking about food differently and redefining your relationship with food is an essential piece of work in recovery.

Our Senior Dietitian, Paula, walks our clients through the following:

Not labeling food as "good" or "bad"

Diet culture is ubiquitous and has taught us to think of food as either "good" or "bad" - meaning that we are either "good" or "bad" for eating it. But **food has no intrinsic moral value**. These are merely a product of diet culture and serves to prop up a billion-dollar industry.

Removing strict rules around certain foods

Abiding by strict rules around food can actually make us crave the food even more, thus becoming more tempting when we are in a situation - or experiencing certain emotions - that can trigger a binge. If we allow ourselves to eat more intuitively - without the rules - we will develop a natural balance. Paula also helps educate clients about food, busting myths where needed and offering specialist insight and guidance.

Removing guilt

Guilt only serves to compound the 'voice' or belief system of the eating disorder. Instead of feeling guilty, we support our clients in developing a compassionate voice in response to challenging situations.

Doing away with counting calories and/or dieting

Counting calories or engaging in a certain diet will only keep us trapped in the cycle of binge eating. Eating disorders by their very nature are defined by preoccupation with food. We don't encourage something that could add fuel to the fire.

Finding joy and comfort in eating again

Paula helps clients to identify the foods they actually enjoy and feel comfortable eating. Eating disorders take away all the pleasure that comes along with food (and eating with others). Together, we help clients to uncover that joy once more so they can return to normality with eating and when eating with others.

And lastly, some things to remember...

You are not your eating disorder.

You are not a 'failure' for having a hard time.

Recovery is absolutely possible.

There is no shame in reaching out for help and support.

You are not alone.

**It takes immense resilience to live with an eating disorder
- you are resilient.**

**You deserve to feel joy - in yourself, with food, with
others, in life.**

You don't need to live with this for the rest of your life.

It is never too late to start recovery.

You can start over as many times as you need.

You should never be shamed into recovery or treatment.

You are worthy, just as you are.

Further reading.

Victoria Emanuela & Caitlin Metz, *My Body, My Home: A Radical Guide to Resilience and Belonging*

Nicole Schnackenberg, *Bodies Arising: Fall in Love with Your Body and Remember Your Divine Essence*

Kirstin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*

Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*

Pema Chödrön, *Start Where You Are*

**We're here to nurture hope
in your recovery.**

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a contact form on our website.**

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