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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

Change Your Thinking to Stop Binge Eating

Targeting the thoughts that lead to binge eating behaviors.

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 Reviewed by Chloe Williams



KEY POINTS

- For the nearly 30 million Americans who will have an eating disorder in their lifetime, binge eating disorder (BED) is by far the most common.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy can be an effective treatment for BED.



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This post was written by Gia Marson, Ed.D.

Eating disorders will impact 28.8 million Americans at some point in their lifetime. Though it is talked about less often, binge eating disorder is significantly

more common than anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa combined. It impacts approximately 1 to 5 percent of all women and men and millions more suffer from binge eating that is not quite frequent enough to meet the diagnostic criteria. For adults with binge eating disorder, low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction are prevalent. Fortunately, binge eating disorder is treatable.

What Is Binge Eating Disorder (BED)?

Binge eating disorder can be defined as compulsively eating to the point of discomfort. Importantly, it entails eating significantly more food than others would in a similar situation, along with

Many people overeat from time to time without suffering any consequences. But binge eating disorder is different because the binge eating episodes become frequent and start to interfere with your happiness, your relationships, and your sense of self-worth.

What Is an Effective Treatment for Binge Eating Disorder (BED)?

Many people mistakenly believe that binge eating disorder can be treated with a rigid diet. But binge eating disorder is actually a mental illness, and one of the most effective treatments is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), a form of therapy that is targeted at changing negative patterns of thinking. It works because thoughts impact behaviors and emotions, such as urges to binge eat, sadness, anxiety, or body dissatisfaction.

Nineteen studies using cognitive behavioral therapy to treat binge eating disorder showed that people who were treated with CBT were nearly seven times more likely to completely stop binge eating compared to people who did not receive this therapy.

Changing Your Thoughts with the Three C's

1. **Catch it: Catch the thoughts that lead to the urge to binge**

eat. The thoughts that you want to catch are the fast-acting automatic thoughts that pop up in response to a situation or an internal experience, without much deliberation or conscious choice. These thoughts can be risky when you act on them without being intentional. Instead, notice the triggers and pause before acting. For example, if you're worried about a performance review at work and the automatic thought "I'll feel better if I eat a whole pizza right now" pops into your head like it does every time you're worried, pause. You've just caught a negative thought.

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2. Check it: Check the facts. Ask yourself, is this thought accurate, balanced, and complete? Try to weigh the facts of the thought to determine its accuracy; likely you will find that the thought is not quite true. Using the same example, you might realize, “Actually, I will probably feel worse if I eat a whole pizza, because that much cheese usually makes me sick, and then I will feel disgusted because I lost control.”

Next, look for imbalances in the thought, such as being overly dramatic or skewing too far in one direction. You might realize that “a whole pizza” and “right now” are exaggerations. You can have just two slices later, after you’ve had a moment to decompress.

Finally, assess whether the thought is complete by looking at what might be missing; oftentimes you’ll find that the thought leaves out important parts of the bigger picture. Maybe it’s not pizza you need but time to write down all the ways you’ve been excelling at your job, so you can share them with your supervisor.

3. Change it: Change your thoughts to be realistic and helpful. By challenging and changing any untrue, unbalanced,

specifically, automatic thinking that normalizes dieting, over-values weight and shape, or promotes all-or-nothing ideas about eating leave you vulnerable when it comes to binge eating.

The good news is that changing problematic thoughts can make all the difference. You can replace those unrealistic, unhelpful thoughts with those that embrace a healthy mentality. Instead of “I’ll feel better if I eat a whole pizza pie right now,” try “I’m actually feeling stressed rather than hungry. I’m going for a walk to calm down, and then later, if I’m hungry, I may have a couple of slices.”

Turn to a Professional

Binge eating disorder can be hard to overcome, but recovery statistics are very promising. With cognitive behavioral therapy and or by using an evidence-based self-help book such as *The Binge Eating Prevention Workbook* , the research shows that you can find peace with food. Depending on the severity of your situation and what you've tried, you might want to look for an eating disorder therapist or a registered dietitian to help you on the path to recovery.

or that you have slipped up, know that you can practice the three C's: catch that discouraging thought, check it for accuracy, then change it to be a healthier thought, such as, "I know I can beat binge eating with the right tools. I'm hopeful. And I'm going to get back on track starting now."

To find a therapist, [visit the Psychology Today Therapy Directory](#)

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