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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

What Actions Can You Take to Stop Binge Eating?

Change how you respond to triggers of compulsive eating and emotional eating.

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✓ Reviewed by Chloe Williams



KEY POINTS

- Precursors to binge eating episodes often include negative mood, skipping meals or snacks, intense hunger, and eating craved foods alone.
- Knowing binge eating triggers can help people take steps to prevent it, such as learning to face negative emotions or giving up dieting.
- Other ways to prevent binge eating include building a balanced meal plan, building aspects of life beyond food and taking note of what works.

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

"It doesn't matter how out of control you might feel around certain foods at the moment. You can gain



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Research dating back more than 30 years gives us clear data: cravings, food rules, negative emotions, and restrictive eating behaviors are precursors to binge eating episodes. And more recent studies add to our body of knowledge, shedding light on what triggers compulsive eating, emotional eating, and binge eating. When you know the precursors to a binge eating episode, you can learn how to stop binge eating and take steps to prevent it.

What does research tell us about the actions that precede binge eating?

Knowing the facts can help you make a behavioral plan to stop loss-of-control eating and prevent binge eating disorder. Let's look at what years of binge eating research suggests:

- Negative mood is significantly greater prior to a binge eating episode compared to non-binge eating times.
- Negative mood is significantly worse after binge eating.

- Hunger is significantly more intense before binge eating than during non-binge eating times.
- Eating craved foods when alone is more likely to lead to binge eating than when eating craved foods in the company of others.
- Binge eating is attributed to a negative mood more often than to hunger or the violation of diet rules.
- Extreme levels of hunger in the morning can drive binge eating if homeostasis or satiety is not reached.
- Cravings later in the day are related to negative mood states more often than those in the morning.

What to do to stop compulsive eating, emotional eating, and binge eating

How to stop binge eating is less complicated than you might think, and it certainly doesn't involve dieting. Environmental food cues, negative body image that leads to dieting, challenging relationships, and difficult emotions are just some of the triggers that can maintain binge eating. Here is what you can do to start binge eating disorder recovery:

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Try something new even if it means being uncomfortable.

We know that intense negative emotions can be precursors to binge eating because we use food to try to avoid them, distract from them, or mask them. Instead, learn to face them. Notice your feelings. Label them—“stress,” “anger,” “anxiety”—when you sense them rising. Ride the wave of your strong emotion; it will peak and dissipate eventually. Cope ahead. Brainstorm options for handling the most triggering emotions.

Stop dieting. Food fads and diets are really just fancy marketing campaigns designed to distract you from what your body intuitively knows. Even diets that purport to be healthy, such as intermittent fasting and the keto diet, deprive you of certain foods or delay regular mealtimes. Diets are not the answer for negative body image because they rarely work for more than a short period of time. Even worse, they often lead to a sense of failure. Rather than cut out food to feel better in your body, add behaviors that make you feel strong, flexible, resilient, comfortable, and healthy. Delaying and skipping meals increases the risk of binge eating because your body is seeking homeostasis. Eat nourishing meals and snacks throughout the day, and learn to listen to your natural hunger and fullness cues.

practice new behaviors. For example, even though giving up dieting can help you to find peace with food, it may be scary to eat all of the food groups on a regular schedule if you have been a chronic dieter. However, facing these fears will reduce the risk of staying stuck in the binge eating cycle. If you have a slip, be curious about what went wrong. Once you identify the trigger(s), write out an action-based plan to implement when you experience that same cue in the future.

Build structure with a meal plan. If you have been on a diet, stock your fridge with plenty of food and order balanced meals that satisfy you when you go out. If you tend to binge eat specific foods, remove those from your home temporarily. Plan to be in the company of other people when you choose to satisfy a craving or eat a food that has led to binge eating in the past. Notice if there is a time of day when you are most likely to binge eat; if so, try not to be alone or schedule an activity you enjoy doing at that time.

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Expand your engagement. Focus on developing aspects of your life outside of food to know what you're moving toward.

that involves other people. You can also work on your relationship with yourself; starting a journal can help you better understand your thoughts and moods, and it can also help you assess challenges, goals, and aspirations.

Catch what works. Learn from the good times. Observe the specifics on days when you nourish yourself well, feel satisfied, and stay tuned in to your hunger and fullness cues. What went right? Did you get more sleep, spend time doing something creative, or have a good laugh with a friend? Keep a list of what works for you. Intentionally repeat the positive actions that contribute to non-binge eating days.

"By structuring your world in the right way, you will reduce your reliance on willpower and increase the automaticity of new, healthy habits." —Marson and Keenan-Miller

It's okay to be afraid to try something new, but don't let that get in your way. When you make the decision to change, it is possible. Invest the time and energy to practice behaviors that sustain long-term recovery from binge eating disorder. You are worth it.

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