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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

Do You Ever Say to Yourself, "I Can't Control My Eating"?

If you want to stop binge eating, change how you think about your behaviors.

Posted September 28, 2021

Reviewed by Abigail Fagan



KEY POINTS

- Many people who have binge eating disorder often describe feeling a loss of control so strong that it feels like an alien has taken over.

symptoms with an open mind as a way to address binge eating.



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*This post was written by
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"I can't control my eating" is a common refrain among those with eating disorders or disordered eating behaviors. They describe their experience—a

cycle of a restrictive eating mindset followed by loss of control with food—as if an alien, a demon, or a drill sergeant has taken over their bodies and is calling the shots.

"I believe that one of the fundamental reasons that we feel stressed in recovery is because we forget that we are meant to be going against the things our eating-disorder brain believes to be important and true." —Tabitha Farrar

It's possible that trying to get rid of your symptoms may be the wrong approach.

Why do we lose control with food?

The reason may be that binge eating is a symptom of a deeper issue. Put another way, binge eating disorder may actually protect you from another, more complex, pain.

What causes binge eating?

We are still learning about what leads a person to be vulnerable to binge eating, but research suggests a variety of potential contributors such as problems dealing with negative emotions, restrictive eating, overvaluation of weight and shape, sleep deprivation, stress, a history of dieting, genetics, low self-esteem, trauma, and interpersonal difficulties.

A recent study (Serra et al., 2020) revealed that the impact of traumatic experiences negatively predicts remission. One theory suggests that trauma may offer a pathway for initiating binge eating by suppressing negative emotions and offering

Pause for a moment to consider what binge eating may be doing *for you* rather than *to you*.

If you are wondering how to stop binge eating, consider where your thoughts are most concentrated. If you are fixating on control—of when, where, what, and how much you eat—you may need to change tactics. While it may seem a strange request, ask yourself if binge eating may be serving a function or trying to protect you.

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"To experience the Self, there's no shortcut around our inner barbarians – those unwelcome parts of

or practice is that we must learn to listen to and ultimately embrace these unwelcome parts. If we can do that...they transform." —Richard Schwartz, Ph.D.

Imagine that binge eating may be your protector. With this shift in thinking, how might your perspective change? What messages are your symptoms trying to convey?

Is binge eating a warning system?

If you are struggling with a pattern of loss-of-control eating, the time lost to behaviors and the shame that comes afterward may be impossible to ignore. What if this distraction and your shame have a purpose: to get your attention? Could it be that binge eating is an alarm signaling that something else is going on?

What message is it sending?

Do you have unmet needs? One individual revealed how an eating disorder can seem like a friend:

"You give me a good reason to hide from things/thoughts/events I know I can't cope with."

that it's time to change your beliefs about body image, dieting, thinness, or muscularity. Maybe binge eating is showing you that denying your genetic makeup is setting you up to fail. Or, binge eating may be protecting you from a traumatic memory.

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Are you welcoming all of your parts?

No matter how loud the eating disorder voice may be and how frequently you try to diet, experience shame, and lose control with food, there is another part of you. You have a healthy self that can listen, learn, and help you heal.

ation of weight and shape, strong urges, and even dissociative experiences—you can reach lasting recovery.

Accept all parts of yourself, even binge eating.

"...when your healthy self gets back in control...your eating disorder self no longer has a job to do and ceases to exist as a separate entity" —Carolyn Costin

Binge eating may be an ally.

Try to change your thinking. Underneath binge eating, there may be a part of you that is waiting for help. A variety of therapies can offer a path forward, depending on your needs:

- *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* is an evidence-based therapy for binge eating disorder. CBT facilitates change by challenging distorted thoughts about food, weight, and shape, increasing effective coping strategies for facing and handling triggers, and creating a structured eating plan.

difficulties and focuses on learning to effectively navigate relational challenges and develop satisfying, supportive relationships.

- *Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training* is a skills-based intervention for responding effectively to emotional states, actively choosing what to eat, noticing hunger, fullness, and satiety cues, and cultivating greater self-acceptance.
- *Internal Family Systems* encourages curiosity about all parts of the self. This evidence-based therapy for trauma asserts that the unique needs of the distressing part (i.e. the binge eating behaviors) has to be understood and addressed until the symptom is no longer needed and balance is achieved.
- *Dialectical Behavior Therapy* is evidenced-based for depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other issues. DBT focuses on building mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness skills. When a person with binge eating disorder struggles with emotion regulation difficulties, it may be helpful.

from binge eating is possible.

To find a therapist to treat eating disorders, visit the [Psychology Today Therapy Directory](#).

References

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