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The Binge Eating Prevention Plan

DIET

# Do All Diets Lead to Losing Control With Food?

Diets are prevalent but may be far from helpful if you want to be healthier.

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✓ Reviewed by Michelle Quirk



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## KEY POINTS

- Avoiding enjoyable foods, limiting the amount, and general restraint are associated with losing control.
- The transition to college is quite risky for the development of eating disorders, and this is true for men.
- Most diets fail to have any impact on weight after 12 months.



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*written by Gia Marson,  
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**Feel like you always end up losing control of your eating once you start a diet? If so, you are not alone.**

There is a strong link between restrictive eating habits—or diets—and binge eating. While dieting may sound from the outside like a simple and straightforward solution to weight frustrations, it can have significant, negative, and unseen side effects on your mental health and behaviors.

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## Dietary Restraint and Loss of Control

**When it comes to dieting, loss-of-control eating is a common negative consequence.**

But what is it about diets that makes us vulnerable to binge eating? One study investigated the effects of dietary restraint in people with loss-of-control eating issues, with patients completing a 7- to 14-day assessment of their eating disorder symptoms.

The results of this study found that the following *behaviors increased the likelihood of loss of control eating* happening in the future:

- Attempts to avoid enjoyable foods
- Limiting the amount of food eaten
- General restraint

## **Don't assume losing weight is healthy.**

Though there are many people, companies, and organizations promoting dieting, yo-yo dieting or weight cycling and even weight loss can have negative consequences.

For example, in one study, investigators looked at cardiovascular disease risk factors after participants were asked to follow healthy eating patterns. In one group, the healthy eating habits were adopted, abandoned, then re-adopted. From the first to the second time the study participants ate according to what was considered healthy, *there was a significant decrease in the heart-health benefit.*

Thus, following an unsustainable diet may lead to problems down the road if it interferes with future positive benefits to cardiovascular disease risk.

## **Fears in Eating Disorders**

Dieting poses a significant threat to health because it is often a central component in the onset and maintenance of eating disorders, which are serious, potentially life-threatening illnesses. In addition, body dissatisfaction and the relationship with food are especially complex for individuals suffering from eating disorders. Fear of certain foods, and particularly fear of weight gain, are two types of fears that we commonly see in individuals with eating disorders.

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One study that investigated *the impact of fears on eating disorder symptoms* found that the those most central were

- Fear of disliking how one's body feels
- Fear of eating in social situations
- Fear of the tense feeling when around food
- Fear of judgment due to body shape and size
- General food anxiety

While diets promise to resolve the fears that play a key role in eating disorders, they may exacerbate them.

*If you spend much of the day worrying about your body shape and size, attempting to restrict your caloric intake, losing control with food, or ruminating about any of the fears listed above, then you may be experiencing unhealthy eating behaviors and thoughts.*

#### THE BASICS

What are healthy approaches to dieting?

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*If the fear of gaining weight or being judged for your physical appearance is causing you to obsess about or start a diet, then you may want to reach out to a doctor or [mental health professional](#).*

# Predictors of Binge Eating and Weight Compensatory Strategies in College Men

Loss-of-control eating can develop into binge-eating symptoms when it becomes frequent and intense. It's especially important to consider factors that may predict the onset of eating disorders in overlooked and underserved populations, such as in men.

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A 2016 study published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, reported that *the transition to college is quite risky for the development of eating disorders, and men tend to show these symptoms consistently during this time.*

For the first-year male college students who participated in the study, the following factors were predictive of persistent engagement in binge eating:

## DIET ESSENTIAL READS

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- Body dissatisfaction

- Increased negative emotional response
- Self-objectification
- Lower self-esteem

As well as being predictive for binge eating, these factors were also correlated with an increase in the following:

- Self-induced vomiting
- Abuse of laxatives and/or diuretics
- Fasting
- Exercise

## Why Dieting Isn't the Answer

Dieting isn't easy, and it is very rarely helpful. In fact, research tells us that *most diets fail to have any impact on weight reduction after 12 months.*

So, what do you do once you are willing to accept that dieting isn't working?

Don't worry, you don't have to throw your hands up in the air if you want to build healthier eating habits—longevity and consistency are most important. The keys to making positive changes to your eating habits and reducing the possibility of losing control with food in the future include the following:

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- ***Don't restrict calories.***

*Make sure you are eating enough.* When you are not consuming the amount of calories your body needs to maintain itself and your activity level, you may inadvertently set off biological responses that lead to other problems, such as lowering your metabolism.

- ***Don't get overly hungry.***

*Getting too hungry before eating or skipping meals is associated with losing control later.* After ignoring your body's gentle hunger signals, you may be especially vulnerable to impulsive, mindless eating and binge eating as your appetite naturally intensifies.

- ***Don't avoid foods you enjoy.***

*Seeking pleasure and avoiding pain is one of our basic human motivations.* If you are not giving yourself permission to eat the foods that you find satisfying, you may have difficulty eating those foods in a positive way the next time you are presented with them.

## The Bottom Line

It's important to check the facts and your assumptions about dieting and take a careful approach to your health if you want to ensure that you're keeping your mental health in check, too. Unfortunately, dieting can negatively impact your mental health because it increases the vulnerability of engaging in binge-eating behaviors—and those are strongly associated with an aftermath of negative consequences such as intense

negative emotions, isolating behaviors, and shame.

But, don't give up if you are committed to making your eating healthier. Start by ruling out dieting because of the associated eating disorder risks and failure rates, then adopt positive changes.

Think about how to add in more of the foods that make your body strong, build a rich gut biome, and take into account your lifestyle, schedule, preferences, nutritional and health needs, and activity level.

### References

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