

Resource Guide:

**Binge Eating Disorder in Children**

By Susannah Brackett

## **Introduction**

Hello. My name is Susannah Brackett. I am currently completing my Master's Degree in Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. For one of my classes, Emotional Disorders in Childhood, I have created a podcast about binge eating disorder in children aimed at helping parents who think their child may be affected by this disorder. A podcast is a short, online audio clip that can be downloaded and listened to through your computer. I have also created this resource guide to go along with the podcast. Within this guide, you will find a glossary of terms, my podcast script, additional resources, and references.

I hope you find all of the information provided to be helpful and interesting as it is so important that we stay informed on disorders such as this one. To find out more information about disorders in children and adolescents, please visit [www.sbbh.pitt.edu](http://www.sbbh.pitt.edu) . This is an excellent website filled with resources aimed at helping to inform children, adolescents, and family members about behavioral and emotional disorders.

## **Glossary**

***Binge eating disorder***- An eating disorder marked by repeated episodes of binge eating. There are usually no compensatory behaviors used to prevent weight gain, such as purging, or excessive exercise. Diagnosis of binge eating disorder is usually based on a person having an average of at least two binge-eating episodes per week for six months or longer.

***Binge episode***- Consuming unusually large amounts of food very quickly and until uncomfortably full. During a binge episode a feeling of being powerless to stop the eating is experienced.

***Diagnostic Criteria***- the number and types of symptoms a person must have in order to be diagnosed with a specific illness.

***Dietitian/Nutrition specialist***- An expert in food and nutrition who helps promote good health through proper eating. They may help an individual to develop a modified diet and educate them on good nutritional habits.

***Psychological therapy***- The treatment of mental and emotional disorders through the use of psychological techniques designed to encourage communication of conflicts and insight into problems, with the goal being relief of symptoms, changes in behavior leading to improved social and vocational functioning, and personality growth.

## **Binge Eating Disorder in Children and Adolescents – A Podcast for Parents**

### **Script**

Hi. My name is Susannah Brackett. With this podcast for the parents of children and adolescents who may have binge eating disorder, I hope to help you to better understand this disorder and what you can do to help your child.

**First of all we need to be clear on the meaning of the term “binge eating disorder”.**

Everyone overeats from time to time and this is not a problem. However, those with binge eating disorder eat unusually large amounts of food on a regular basis, often alone or in secret. During a binge, they eat quickly and don't stop eating when they're full, all the while feeling out of control and powerless to stop eating. Feelings of guilt, shame, or disgust will frequently follow the episode (MayoClinic). This is why binge eating is also sometimes referred to as compulsive overeating.

Binge eating disorder is unlike the more well known eating disorders, anorexia and bulimia, in that there are usually no compensatory measures taken such as forcing themselves to vomit, dramatically restricting food intake, or exercising excessively to burn off the extra calories. Because they are regularly consuming more calories than their bodies can use, those who binge eat are often, but not always, overweight or obese.

As a result, those with binge eating disorder may feel bad about themselves and their bodies, which may lead to further bingeing. These behaviors will also be putting them at risk for health problems associated with being overweight such as type 2 diabetes, high blood-pressure, high cholesterol, gallbladder disease, heart disease, and certain types of cancer (womenshealth).

This is why it is so important for everyone to be aware of binge eating disorder and for the families and friends of someone who is suffering with it to be knowledgeable about the disorder, understanding and caring towards the person, and to do what they can to help. Just by listening to this podcast, you are taking the first step by educating yourself on this disorder so that you will be better equipped to help the one you love who may have binge eating disorder.

**Who gets binge eating disorder anyway?**

Recent studies have found that between 2 and 4 percent of the adult population in the United States has binge eating disorder, making it the most common of all the eating disorders. It is seen slightly more often in females than in males, but unlike the other eating disorders, the difference between the genders is not very large. For every three females with binge eating disorder, there are two males. It is more common in those who are obese, but affects people of healthy weight too (Costin, 1999).

Both children and adults can develop binge eating disorder. Adults in treatment for binge eating disorder often say that their problems began in childhood or adolescence.

There is still very little information on how many children and teens are affected by this disorder, partly because it is still very newly recognized, and partly because those with it are too embarrassed to seek help (Costin, 1999). And since most binge eating is done alone, even the parents of a child with binge eating disorder may not know that this is happening.

Therefore, it is important for parents to be aware of the warning signs of this disorder, so that it can be caught and treated early on in childhood and hopefully kept more under control.

### **So, what are some signs or symptoms of binge eating disorder that parents should be alert for?**

Just because your child or teen sometimes eats a lot does not mean that he or she has binge eating disorder. There are times when it is necessary for a child to eat more due to their rapid growth.

However, the first thing that parents or family members often notice to make them suspect a problem is when large amounts of food seem to be going missing from the kitchen.

Other signs to look out for include:

- Your child shows a pattern of eating in response to stress, sadness, or anxiety.
- He or she begins to show an increasingly irregular eating pattern such as skipping meals, eating at unusual times, and eating a lot of junk food.
- Your child eats large amounts of food very quickly.
- He or she shows feelings of shame or disgust over the amount of food they have eaten.

- You find hoarded food or empty food containers hidden in his or her bedroom.
- You notice a sudden weight gain or weight fluctuations in your child.

Someone with binge eating disorder may also experience feelings that are common to many eating disorders, such as depression, anxiety, guilt, or shame (womenshealth). They may start to avoid school or social events because they're ashamed of their binge eating problem or changes in their body shape (Costin, 1999).

### **So, what should you do if you notice signs of binge eating disorder in your child or adolescent?**

Children with eating disorders will rarely acknowledge that they have a problem or ask for help. Therefore, it is usually up to family and friends to realize that there may be a problem and to do everything they can to help.

If you suspect your child has a problem with binge eating, visit your child's pediatrician or family doctor for advice and for a referral to a qualified mental health professional that has experience treating eating disorders in children (Walsh & Cameron, 2005). This needs to be done as soon as possible and it is best that it is not done secretly, but that everything is discussed with your child.

Explain to him or her why you think that help is needed and what the next step will be. The best thing that you can do for your child is to reassure him or her that you're there to help or even just to listen.

Be supportive; know that *you* play a huge role in helping your child to recover.

### **What can the doctor do to help your child and what will the next step be?**

Your child's doctor can only diagnose binge eating disorder after discussing your child's medical history, any family history, patterns of eating in the family, and emotional issues your child may have. The doctor will also perform a complete physical (Walsh & Cameron, 2005).

After a diagnosis is made, the doctor can tell you and your child what the next step should be. There are many options for treating binge eating disorder and you will need to discuss with your child and their doctor which will be best as this varies from one individual to the next.

Research has found that it is best for treatment to begin immediately following diagnosis of an eating disorder, with the child, his or her parents and treatment providers all working together (Walsh & Cameron, 2005).

There are many aspects to a treatment plan for binge eating disorder. It is important for a child or adolescent with binge eating disorder to receive psychological therapy in which they can learn healthy ways of coping with emotions and stress instead of using food to do this. There are different types of therapy that can help to treat binge eating disorder. These can be one-on-one with a therapist, group based, or even involving the entire family. Which of these is best for your child is something that should be discussed with their doctor or psychiatrist.

In some cases doctors will also prescribe medication in combination with the therapy (womenshealth).

Your child may also be referred to a nutrition specialist or dietitian who can help them to learn about healthy eating behaviors, nutritional needs, exercise, and how to have a more healthy relationship with food.

Unfortunately there is no quick fix for binge eating disorder. Recovery can take several months or longer and can be difficult, not only for your child, but for your entire family.

### **What can you and your family do to best support your child while he or she goes through treatment for binge eating disorder?**

As the family of a child with binge eating disorder, you will play a big part in their recovery. It is important that you set a good example for your child, modeling healthy living and self-acceptance.

Educate yourself about eating disorders and their treatment. Know and understand the treatments that your child is undergoing. Talk to your child's doctors and don't be afraid to ask them to explain anything you may not be sure of.

Show your child that you care by truly listening to their feelings and concerns without feeling the need to criticize or offer advice unless they ask for it.

Take care of yourself. Make sure that you have your own support so that you are, in turn, able to provide the same to your child. Your own support system may include trusted friends, family, or a support group. It is important that you do not neglect your own needs when focusing on helping your child to get better.

There are many great resources that you may find useful in order to learn more about binge eating disorder and how you can help your child. These books and websites are listed on the resource guide that goes along with this podcast.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to this podcast. I hope that you now feel that you know a little more about binge eating disorder and what you can do to best help your child.



### Additional Resources

These are just a few of the many resources that are available online for learning more about binge eating disorder in children and adolescents:

Eating Disorders: What Families Need to Know- More information about eating disorders that is aimed at helping families. <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/eatdis.htm>

KidsHealth for parents: Binge Eating Disorder – Provides information about binge eating disorder in children and teens for parents.  
[http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/feeding/binge\\_eating.html#a>About\\_Binge\\_Eating\\_Disorder](http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/feeding/binge_eating.html#a>About_Binge_Eating_Disorder)

KidsHealth for teens: Binge Eating Disorder – Discusses binge eating disorder in a teen-friendly way.  
[http://kidshealth.org/teen/food\\_fitness/problems/binge\\_eating.html#a\\_Understanding\\_Binge\\_Eating](http://kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/problems/binge_eating.html#a_Understanding_Binge_Eating)

MayoClinic.com: Binge Eating Disorder – This site gives some more in-depth information about binge eating disorder in general and describes the different types of therapy available.  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/binge-eating-disorder/DS00608>

If Your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder: An Essential Resource for Parents by B.T. Walsh and V.L. Cameron – An online book that discusses eating disorders in adolescents and the treatment for them. <http://www.copecaredeal.org/Files/Eating-Disorder-book.pdf>

## References

Costin, Carolyn (1999). The Eating Disorder Sourcebook. Second Edition. *A Comprehensive Guide to the Causes, Treatments, and Prevention of Eating Disorders*. NTC Contemporary. Los Angeles, California.

MayoClinic.com: Binge Eating Disorder. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/binge-eating-disorder/DS00608>

Rizvi, S., Stice, E., & Telch, C. (2000). Development and validation of the eating disorder diagnostic scale: a brief self-report measure of anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating disorder. *Psychological Assessment*. Vol 12, No. 2, 123-131.

The Children's Hospital: *Binge Eating Disorder*.

<http://www.thechildrenshospital.org/wellness/info/parents/20576.aspx>

Walsh, B. T., & Cameron, V. L. (2005). *If Your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder: An Essential Resource for Parents*. Retrieved from <http://www.copecaredeal.org/Files/Eating-Disorder-book.pdf>

womenshealth.gov. Binge Eating Disorder: Frequently Asked Questions.

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/binge-eating-disorder.cfm>