

Bulimia and Related Mental Health Issues

Bulimia (bulimia nervosa) is a psychiatric condition which is characterized by bingeing and purging behaviors, associated with a negative perception of one's own body image. Bingeing is usually described as ingesting a large amount of food in a short period of time—often this food is high in fats and sugars. Purging can involve a number of different actions designed to rid the body of what the sufferer feels is excess weight or the food they previously consumed. This can be vomiting, taking diuretic or laxative medications, or excessive exercising.

It is common for a bulimic person to be of normal weight or overweight, and while both men and women can suffer from bulimia, young women are more likely to be afflicted ([Primary Care Companion to The Journal of Clinical Psychology](#)). Often people with bulimia suffer from low self-esteem and a feeling of having lost control.

There are several other related mental health issues that often precede an onset of bulimia. The [Primary Care Companion to The Journal of Clinical Psychology](#) (PCCJCP) mentions “high prevalence rates of any affective disorder (75%), major depressive disorder (63%), and anxiety disorders (36%)” among patients being treated for bulimia.

Affective, Depressive and Anxiety Disorders

The [Journal of Affective Disorders - Elsevier](#) identifies affective disorders as their broadest terms of depression, mania, anxiety and panic. The [National Institute of Mental Health](#) (NIMH) describes depression as a feeling of being sad or blue that lasts beyond a few days and interferes with the ability to carry on with and enjoy normal life. Mania is referred to as an [“overly joyful or overexcited state”](#). Often, depression and mania are linked within the same individual and if the symptoms are severe enough, they may be treated for bipolar disorder—which is the combination of depressive and manic states occurring within the same person. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) defines anxiety and its associated disorders as “characterized by excessive and unrealistic worry about everyday tasks or events, or may be specific to certain objects or rituals”. The NIMH considers [panic](#) to be a kind of anxiety disorder.

Self-Injury

The PCCJCP highlights self-injury as being a significant component to the psychology of a notable percentage of people suffering from bulimia, stating: “in one study, 34% of bulimic patients reported having injured themselves at sometime in their lives, and 21.3% reported having injured themselves in the last 5 months”. The [Journal of Adolescent Health \(2011\)](#) reported a study that involved 1,432 adolescents diagnosed with an eating disorder. 40.8% of these 10-21 year olds were reported to be engaged in self-injurious behavior which may include purposely cutting, scratching and otherwise causing bodily harm to oneself often resulting in bleeding and scarring.

Bulimia may very well not stand alone, or develop in an isolated manner. There are many signs, symptoms and other behavioral disorders that are frequently related to an eating disorder such as bulimia. If you are worried about a loved one suffering from bulimia, it may be helpful to think about their complete behavioral history and personality profile, to help determine if they are also at risk for bulimia. It is not unusual to have to evaluate the ‘whole picture’ in order to identify a disorder as sinister as bulimia—because the existence of bulimia is usually not obvious.

Futures of Palm Beach is fully staffed with PhD-level professionals, for which evaluating a patient's 'whole picture' is second nature. If you think you or someone you care about is dealing with bulimia and its commonly related other mental health issues, call Futures of Palm Beach. Futures of Palm Beach will not treat bulimia as a simple, isolated problem—understanding that bulimic behavior may be one element of a complex tapestry of various mental health issues, all of which will be comprehensively addressed in a caring, professional environment dedicated to the individual and their unique history.