

Bulimia Help Method

Version 3.1

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A special thanks:

A special thanks to our contributors who offered up their free time to provide feedback, insights and contributions to the program. All contributors have recovered from bulimia using the Bulimia Help Method. Eileen L. "Take it one step at a time and you will get there!"

Rachel K "Never EVER Give up"

Renee Smith "This program works!!"

Amy L "Have faith"

Jessica "We can do this!"

Kathryn "Everyday is an opportunity to advance further in recovery"

Jess "Where there's a will, there's a way. Where there's not, there's an excuse!"

Annri "Overcoming bulimia is simply a chance to prove to yourself how strong and capable you really are. Never doubt recovery. You CAN do it!"

Una “Take action NOW”

Olga B “Believe in yourself. You are wonderful, unique and resourceful.”

Mary “This program truly works. Over 20 years of hell to freedom. If you believe..... you CAN :-) You’re worth it!!!”

Katherine “Who will you be once you're recovered? If you don't stick this out, you'll never get to know!”

How to use this program

It doesn't matter how long you have had bulimia nervosa - this book WILL help you.

Read it carefully and let it motivate and guide you through your recovery.

Some of these concepts may seem new to you, so you will need to rethink a good deal of what you **believe is true about eating and weight management**. I recommend you reread this book a few times and always keep it nearby during your recovery for reference.

Its best to read through the whole guide once before you start your recovery.

This will help give you a good overview of what recovery is all about. It’s also a great idea to have a notepad and pen ready, so you can jot down key points and pages.

Recovery one step at a time

We have broken the recovery process into small steps. Each step will take you a little closer to being fully recovered. Please take each step one at a time and once you feel comfortable with that step, take the next one and do a little more.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or if you find a particular step too difficult, it's perfectly OK to go back a few steps and wait until you feel more confident before moving forward again.

Some aspects of the program will resonate more with you than others and that's OK. I encourage you to discover what works best for you in recovery and to run with it.

It’s good to keep in mind that everyone’s recovery journey is unique. There is no right or wrong way to approach recovery. **As long as you are committed to the recovery process that's all that matters.**

Don’t worry if you are nervous, scared, anxious or concerned about the program. It’s perfectly normal to feel this way right now.

It’s okay if you don’t feel strong right now, that strength will build as you continue on your journey. You have already shown your inner strength by taking the steps to start recovery.

Regardless of whether you are afraid of failing, changing, being vulnerable or not being able to cope, **fear can be the best indicator that you are about to grow, learn and experience something that you thought was completely beyond you before now.**

Just stick with us, go at your own pace, and let us guide you along the way.

Introducing The Bulimia Help Method

You can recover

Living with bulimia is really tough.

We feel compelled to binge on food that we must later purge. We feel ashamed, dirty and try to

hide our secret addiction. It digs into us, creating dark thoughts, and undercutting our self esteem.

Life simply becomes a tiring show, where we constantly put on a happy face to hide our dark secret. We feel weak, broken, confused, lost and hopeless. It's really no wonder that at times we feel like we are going crazy.

But it doesn't have to be like this.

You may have heard that it's impossible to recover from bulimia.

You may have heard that you will have bulimia for the rest of your life.

I'm telling you right now that this is just NOT true.

You can be 100% totally cured.

It CAN happen to YOU.

There is such a thing as TOTAL RECOVERY FOR LIFE.

And I am not talking about, "watch out, be careful, bulimia might come back to haunt you any day" type of recovery.

I am talking about a 100%, complete freedom, food becomes just food, type recovery!

We have witnessed this first hand, time and time again. My wife Ali had full blown bulimia for 10 years. She followed the program and now Ali is not just in recovery, she is FULLY recovered.

And it's all here.

All the information you need for recovery is here in The Bulimia Help Method®.

No time wasting, no unnecessary content and no nonsense. Just easy to follow steps and techniques in a system that works.

Let's get started shall we?

Let me ask you a question...

What's the difference between a person with bulimia and a non-bulimic person?

Well, obviously one binges and purges and the other doesn't.

But, wouldn't that mean that you are not bulimic 'in-between' bingeing and purging?

Do you FEEL like a non-bulimic in between binges?

For many the answer is certainly NO.

So what's the real difference?

The difference is: A non-bulimic doesn't CRAVE, DESIRE or WANT to binge.

A non-bulimic is completely FREE from the URGE to binge.

In fact, you could say that the only difference between a bulimic and a non-bulimic is that a bulimic person will experience an URGE to binge.

The difference is the URGE to binge.

This is what makes a bulimic person bulimic.

Let's think about this a little:

No matter what the trigger may be;

No matter what the situation is;

No matter what your thinking is;

Before every single binge you will experience an URGE to binge.

This is the one, universal constant before every binge.

Let's look at it this way:

Imagine you're alone in the house.

You're bored;

You're feeling down;

You've had a stressful day;

There is food in the cupboard;

But strangely you have absolutely NO urge or desire to binge on food.

Then would you binge?

I am guessing not.

That would be like drinking 5 gallons of water even though you had no thirst or urge to do so.

The point here is this:

If you didn't experience an URGE to binge.

You wouldn't binge.

And therefore you would not be bulimic.

It's the URGE to binge that makes us bulimic.

If the urge to binge is making us bulimic;

Then in order to recover from bulimia we need to remove the URGE to binge.

Let me repeat that.

To recover from bulimia we need to remove the urge to binge.

That's it.

That is your new goal for recovery.

Recovery no longer has to feel like an insurmountable and vague impossible dream. Now it can be summed up in one powerful, easy to understand sentence:

Removing the urge to binge is your key to recovery.

This is your new path to living free.

Once the URGE to binge is gone; your bulimia is gone.

Changing the definition of bulimia

Bulimia is defined as episodic binge eating usually followed by purging such as self-induced vomiting, laxative abuse, excessive exercise, or fasting (I am sure you already know this).

I think this definition could be improved:

For me a better definition of bulimia would be- **regular urges to binge on food**, which can be followed by an episode of bingeing and purging.

The key difference is the phrase “regular urges to binge on food”. For some reason, everyone seems to forget about this **really important** aspect of bulimia.

The two reasons you feel compelled to binge.

We now know that we need to remove any binge urges in order to recover.

That’s good to know, but if we don’t know HOW to remove the binge urges then that information doesn’t really help us much.

So the next big question to ask is:

What causes the urge that leads to bingeing (“the binge urge”)?

To answer this question we must first understand the different types of binge urges:

The **Body Binge Urge** and the **Mind Binge Urge**. Let’s learn a little more about them.

1. The Body Binge Urge.

This is the BIG one. All people with bulimia will experience this type of binge urge and it probably accounts for most of your binge urges. For some, curing this binge urge alone is enough for a full recovery.

You may experience this binge urge because your body is malnourished and dehydrated. Purging, restricting and not eating enough food keeps you in a malnourished state. Being malnourished creates EXTREMELY powerful binge urges.

This can sound a bit crazy considering bulimics tend to eat a LOT of food. But it’s true.

As a bulimic you purge either through fasting, excessive exercise, laxatives, or vomiting which is certain to ensure that your body remains malnourished.

In this state, the hormones leptin and ghrelin (associated with fullness and hunger) are not functioning properly due to starvation.

The resulting "strive to survive" makes you want to binge... which shouldn’t really come as a surprise.

When you are hungry, you experience gentle hunger pangs, and when you are excessively hungry and malnourished you experience MASSIVE hunger pangs or urges to binge.

This is quite natural.

There is nothing strange about it.

Your body thinks that you are in the middle of a famine and it is doing everything it can to ensure you are eating enough food.

To stop these massive hunger pangs, we simply need to teach our body that the famine is over. We do this by following a structured eating plan.

And it’s the **single most powerful thing** you can do to recover fully.

2. The Mind Binge Urge.

For some, solving the Body Binge Urge is enough to cure their bulimia, but for others recovery can be a little more complicated.

If you have had bulimia for a long time, you may be relying on bulimia for psychological support and this can lead to Mind Binge Urges.

The Mind Binge Urge starts above the neck and is usually triggered by an uncomfortable feeling or emotion (such as stress or anxiety).

It is generally associated with avoidance, whether it is something tangible (such as work obligations) or something intangible (like emotions). There is a strong desire to eat food to dull thought processes and numb emotional pain.

Put simply, we binge on food to quiet the mind or to eliminate uncomfortable feelings.

What's in the program?

The rest of the Bulimia Help Method® is dedicated to showing you exactly how you can completely remove the two binge urges.

To begin, we explore your bulimia and help you understand it in a new light. After that, the program is split up into stages.

Stage 1 of the program is called **“Rebalancing Your Body.”** In this stage, we provide you with lots of practical information on how to remove the Body Binge Urge.

Stage 2 is called **“Diffusing the Mind Binge Urge.”** In this stage, we will explore the role your thoughts and emotions play in your bulimia. Here we will provide you with practical steps to remove the Mind Binge Urge.

Once we remove the binge urges you will no longer feel compelled to binge.

If you have NO urge to do something, you won't do it.

If you don't binge then you won't purge.

If you aren't bingeing and purging you are no longer bulimic.

And then you are recovered.

But that's not all:

Some of you may have been struggling with weight/ food issues for years prior to the onset of bulimia. Some of you may have **never** had a “normal” relationship with food.

Perhaps you fear going back to your old eating habits, as you know they caused you the trouble in the first place.

This is where Stage 3: Intuitive Training will really help you. You will learn how to stop relying on calories, food plans and food rules to dictate how you should eat and instead you will rely on your intuition. This is an extremely powerful and simple way to eat food that will allow you to maintain a healthy weight for life without any pain, suffering, rules or plans.

This stage will show you exactly how to have a **lifelong healthy relationship with food.**

I believe this stage to be the **secret key to lifelong recovery** from bulimia.

Don't worry if this all sounds a little unfamiliar at this point. Right now I just want to give you a simple brief outline. We will explore these concepts in more detail throughout the program. Just stick with us and it will become very clear.

I guarantee by the end of this book you will look at bulimia in a completely new light.

Self improvement without you having to think about it!

Our program doesn't focus on self improvement.

We don't ask you to build your confidence or improve your self-esteem.

Our focus is on removing the binge urge.

One of the reasons for this is because studies show that there is **no scientific evidence that resolving underlying psychological problems leads to recovery** (Walsh and Cameron, If Your Adolescent Has an Eating Disorder, 77).

We focus on removing the urge to binge.

And this is where the magic happens.

Nourishing your body, stopping bingeing and regaining your life free from bulimia **are the best things** you can do to rebuild your confidence and improve your self-esteem.

The best part is that it all happens naturally over time **without you having to think about it!**

The Bulimia Help Method® has helped thousands overcome bulimia and many of them say they can't believe the difference in their mental well-being after recovery. They feel so much more confident and positive.

It is as if you slowly remember the person you used to be before your eating disorder took over - except now you are a little wiser and more mature.

So do NOT think "I need to improve my self-esteem before I can recover! " or that you "have too many issues and can't recover from bulimia!"

The belief that you need to resolve all your other issues before you can recover is NOT true. It is the other way round: **FIRST** recover from bulimia by removing the urge to binge, **THEN** watch as your well-being is naturally restored!

"Will my weight spiral out of control?"

I know this is a big concern to many, so let me stress - by following this program I assure you that your weight will not spiral out of control.

Research shows that most people with bulimia, in the healthy weight range, who adopt regular eating habits and don't purge, end up within 1kg of where they started, and **some even lose weight**.

A new study, led by a researcher from Drexel University, suggests that bulimia leads to weight gain. And the longer you battle bulimia, the **more your weight will escalate**.

We will go into much more detail about this later, but for now, please rest assured your weight will NOT spiral out of control.

"How will I know when I am recovered?"

Put simply, you will know when you are recovered from bulimia because you will no longer crave or desire to binge on food.

"But I purge if I eat anything... I don't have to binge to want to purge"

For some, eating even the smallest amount of food can lead to a purge. Don't worry, we also offer

practical advice on how to address this issue throughout the program.

How long does recovery take?

Although everyone is different, in general it takes around 6 months for the binge urges to disappear and a further 6 months to rebuild your confidence around food. Many of our members feel as though they are fully recovered around the 12-18 month mark.

If this feels like a long time, please do not feel disheartened: What we are aiming for here is total recovery for LIFE. You will **start to notice the benefits of recovery almost immediately**.

Please see the section “What to expect in recovery” for a detailed recovery timeline.

Recovery will be an amazing adventure of discovery.

Look at recovery as a challenging adventure of discovery. Only you are not exploring a lost civilisation, or forgotten land instead you are discovering the amazing person you are without the shackles of bulimia. If you have had bulimia for a long time you may not be sure who you are without bulimia. Like a superhero discovering his powers for the first time so too will you discover all you can be once you are free from the kryptonite that is bulimia.

Your journey will bring thousands of discoveries, with new ones arriving each day.

You will discover what calm feels like, what balance feels like, what contentment feels like.

You will discover that you can easily engage in activities that previously struck fear into the deepest recesses of your heart.

You will discover what it feels like to have an abundance of energy and a lightness of spirit.

You will discover new interests and new passions.

You will discover your inner strength and self reliance.

You will discover all the amazing fantastic things that make you the truly wonderful, caring, loving, soulful person you already are.

And this is an important point.

This is who you **already are**.

This ISN'T a NEW you.

You aren't changing.

Bulimia was holding you back, robbing you of your life and draining your soul.

You were always made to fly but bulimia had you shackled to the ground.

Recovery from bulimia is a reward not an ordeal.

Yes at times recovery may be challenging but the benefits FAR OUTWEIGH any effort required. It's like having to climb a mountain to reach your dream holiday destination. Sure the mountain climb was a challenge, but that is the last thing you will be thinking about when you are enjoying your dream holiday.

But this undersells recovery.

Recovery is much better than that.

Recovery will vastly improve EVERY aspect of your life.

It's like winning the lottery,

every day

for the rest of your life...

only better.

Life will feel like a reward, a victory lap, a second chance.

Everyday will feel like you have won.

Recovery will be the best gift you will ever give yourself in your life.

Understanding Bulimia

It's all about food!

A common phrase you often hear is that bulimia "is not about food!".

Well, I disagree.

Bulimia has a LOT to do with food.

An awful lot.

Perhaps that's why it's called an "eating disorder".

In fact, I believe NOT addressing the core issue of food is one of the main reasons why many bulimics spend years failing at recovery.

In this section, you will learn that the symptoms of bulimia have more to do with food than you may have previously thought.

Well, to be more accurate, it is not so much about the food as it is about the lack of it.

Let's look at a very famous science experiment to help explain things a little further.

The Ancel Keys Semi Starvation Study

This is the only large scale, long term scientific study to ever explore the effects of semi-starvation on humans. For obvious ethical reasons it wouldn't be allowed to happen today, but in the less "health and safety" conscious 1950s it was acceptable.

This study is important.

And for many this study can make you question the validity of your beliefs surrounding bulimia and what created it in the first place.

This study is scientific evidence that every single side effect of bulimia nervosa can be accounted for by not eating enough food.

If you just read that sentence and didn't really let its meaning sink in, let me repeat it.

This study is scientific evidence that every single side effect of bulimia nervosa can be

accounted for by not eating enough food.

More than 100 men volunteered for the study as an alternative to military service; the 36 selected had the highest levels of physical and psychological health.

They were put on calorie-restrictive diets of about 1,600 calorie/day for 6 months (which is more generous than many weight loss diets prescribe today).

As the men lost weight, their physical endurance dropped by half and their reflexes became sluggish. The men's resting metabolic rates declined by 40%, their heart volume shrank about 20%, their pulses slowed and their body temperatures dropped.

Physically they complained of feeling:

- Tired
- Cold
- Hungry
- Had trouble concentrating
- Impaired judgment and comprehension
- Dizzy spells
- Visual disturbances
- Ringing in their ears
- Tingling and numbing of their extremities
- Stomach aches
- Body aches and headaches
- Trouble sleeping
- Hair thinning
- Skin growing dry and thin..
- The men had every physical indication of accelerated aging.

But it was the PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES BROUGHT ON BY DIETING that were the most profound and unexpected...

The men became:

- Nervous
- Anxious
- Apathetic
- Withdrawn
- Impatient
- Self-critical
- Moody
- Emotional
- Depressed
- They had a distorted body image
- They had feelings of being overweight.

One man experienced a number of periods in which his spirits were definitely high. These elated periods alternated with times in which he suffered, "a deep dark depression."

Those who ate in the common dining room smuggled out bits of food and consumed them on their bunks in a long, drawn-out ritual.

One man chopped off three of his fingers with an axe and was unsure if he had done so intentionally or accidentally!

Food proved to be the main topic in conversation. Not only did they continually talk about food, but many of the participants started to read cookbooks, collect recipes (which were later pinned to the wall, replacing posters of women), and daydream about eating.

One man even began rummaging through garbage cans. This general tendency to hoard has been observed in starved anorexic patients (Crisp, Hsu, & Harding, 1980) and even in rats deprived of food (Fantino & Cabanac, 1980).

The consumption of coffee and tea increased so dramatically that the men had to be limited to 9 cups per day. Similarly, gum chewing became excessive and had to be limited, after it was discovered that one man was chewing as many as 40 packages of gum a day and "developed a sore mouth from such continuous exercise."

Before meal serving time, the study participants would battle in their heads as to how they would eat the meal; either gobble it down, or simmer over it enjoying every mouthful. Many took an extraordinary amount of time to eat it, trying to make it last as long as possible.

It was reported that a number of the participants did binge, including one man who worked in a grocery store who owned up to eating several cookies, a sack of popcorn and even two overripe bananas. This man told how he felt incredibly anxious following his binge and **totally disgusted in himself therefore ending up vomiting!**

1 in 5 of the participants found themselves in unstable mental states that affected their daily functioning despite being in perfect mental health prior to the study – and all that had changed was the way that they ate!

The re-feeding phase

During the re-feeding phase of the experiment:

Many of the men lost control of their appetites and "ate more or less continuously."

Even after 12 weeks of re-feeding, the men frequently complained of "increased hunger immediately following a large meal."

Several men had spells of nausea and vomiting. One man was released from the experiment because he was unable to adhere to the diet. He repeatedly went through the cycle of **eating tremendous quantities of food, becoming sick, and then starting all over again.**

Some of the men found it difficult to stop eating.

Their daily intake commonly ranged between 8,000 and 10,000 calories, and their eating patterns were described as follows:

"Subject No. 20 stuffs himself until he is bursting at the seams, to the point of being nearly sick and still feels hungry;

No. 12 reported that he had to discipline himself to keep from eating so much as to become ill;

No. 1 ate until he was uncomfortably full; and subject

No. 30 had so little control over the mechanics of "piling it in" that he simply had to stay away from food because he could not find a point of satiation even when he was "full to the gills."...

"I ate practically all weekend," reported subject No. 26...

Subject No. 26 would just as soon have eaten six meals instead of three."

Keys, A., Brozek, J., Henschel, A., Mickelsen, O., & Taylor, H. L. (1950). The biology of human starvation.

After about 5 months of re-feeding, the majority of the men reported some normalization of their eating patterns; for some however, the extreme over-consumption persisted.

With unlimited food and unrestricted eating, their weights plateaued and finally, about 9 months later most had **naturally returned to their initial weights without trying**, giving scientists one of

the first demonstrations that each body has a natural, genetic set point.

There was a fear with unrestrained eating 'that the men would continue to grow bigger' however, **this never happened.**

As they regained their weight, the men's metabolism increased and they returned to their initial weights without trying.

This study PROVES that:

The effects of starvation are incredibly similar to that of eating disorders (Polivy, J & C.P. Herman 1976).

And that:

Many of the symptoms that might have been thought to be specific to anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are actually the results of starvation (Pirke & Ploog, 1987).

Remember...

these men didn't have traumatic upbringings;

genetic disorders;

or mental health issues prior to the study;

and they were not unduly concerned about food and weight.

It didn't matter what personality they had or where they came from, they still managed to fall into the dark world of anxiety, food obsession, bingeing and depression of an eating disorder and this was on 1600 calories a day. (Bear in mind many diets are even lower than that).

The tests revealed that the men who appeared to be the most psychologically adjusted had a more severe reaction to the starvation diet.

This isn't just a one off study; these findings are also supported by a large body of research indicating that habitual dieters display marked overcompensation in eating behaviour that is similar to the binge eating observed in eating disorder patients" (Polivy & Herman, 1985, 1987; Wardle & Beinart, 1981).

This pattern is not just a matter of overindulgence. Animal studies, as well as a study of conscientious objectors on hunger strikes, have shown that reintroducing food after starvation triggers wildly out-of-control eating.

Food restriction leads to bulimia.

Here are a few more interesting facts about food restriction.

Dieting is a primary trigger of the downward spiral into an eating disorder (Thompson & Sherman, 1993).

Severe dieters have already begun the process to an eating disorder (BMJ 1999;318:765-768, 20 March).

Girls who severely dieted were 18 times more likely to develop an eating disorder within 6 months than those who did not diet (BMJ 1999; 318:765-768, 20 March).

It doesn't even have to be a severe diet - 2/3 of new cases of an eating disorder came from those who dieted moderately (BMJ 1999; 318:765-768, 20 March).

This leads us to the simple conclusion that:

Food restriction or dieting precedes the vast majority of eating disorders.

Or more clearly:

Food restriction or dieting is the number one cause of eating disorders.

This is not my interpretation.

This is not a best guess.

It's a clean and simple fact.

Dieting causes bulimia.

And it's not necessarily just diets, any type of food restriction can cause an eating disorder.

These include:

1. Avoiding major food groups like fat in the belief that you are eating healthily.
2. Excessive exercise and not eating enough food to compensate for the extra energy expenditure.
3. Food allergies may, on the rare occasion, require you to avoid specific food groups.
4. A detox program.

And the important thing to keep in mind: this has NOTHING to do with the way your brain works. It has NOTHING to do with your personality, your history or your self-esteem. These things don't matter. **If you restrict your food intake you are susceptible to becoming bulimic.**

If the healthiest happiest person on the planet restricted their food intake they would make themselves susceptible to becoming bulimic.

Chances are, if you had never restricted your food intake, you would never have felt compelled to binge on food and you would never have purged.

It's REALLY that simple.

It's a bit shocking isn't it.

I know you probably find it hard to believe me here, and so did I at first.

I thought, "Could it really be that simple?"

It turns out, yes it is that simple.

Recovery quote

"I am a member of a fitness forum and while checking out some posts I came upon a thread I hadn't seen before. Eating disorder support...hmm, have to check that out..

Wow..what I found was a group of MEN..these are a group of bodybuilders, fitness experts, personal trainers, some of them military..

All who had gone on some sort of extreme diet and suddenly were gripped by the symptoms of an eating disorder..

What hit me so profoundly was how confused some of them were..one said it felt like his body suddenly rebelled against him. Some of them had no idea how they had suddenly seemed to develop an eating disorder, and were in disbelief over it. Men who had no previous problem..hmm sounds familiar"

So how exactly does a diet lead to an eating disorder?

So how exactly does a diet lead to an eating disorder? I can understand how it can seem like a bit

of a mystery how a diet can somehow lead to an eating disorder.

So let's break the process down into smaller steps so it becomes more clear.

Step 1: You go on a diet and experience deprivation.

Every diet boils down to two simple things

1. Eat less food.
2. Exercise more.

If only it were that simple.

When your body is deprived of food, you become hungry. But, because you are on a diet you ignore these hunger pangs.

Which for a very short while might make you feel good about yourself.

You may feel like this is the first step to a new you, that you are finally taking control of your life.

You might even feel proud of your great self-control.

But, as you continue to ignore your hunger,

you slowly start to feel the sinking lonely, insecure feeling of deprivation.

Step 2: The diet gets tougher so you restrict more.

In the beginning most diets do lead to some weight loss, that is, until you hit the weight loss plateau. Here your weight stubbornly stays the same despite eating less and less.

This happens with all diets.

This is because your body has slowed down its internal workings (basal metabolic rate BMR) so that it can survive with fewer calories.

Your basal metabolic rate accounts for about two-thirds of the body's total energy needs so any change at all can make a huge impact in your ability to lose weight.

At this stage a lot of people grow tired of the deprivation and constant hunger and just quit dieting. Eventually they may try another diet and steps 1 and 2 are just repeated indefinitely.

Although they may feel like failures for quitting at this point (every diet makes people feel like a failure eventually) in reality they should actually consider themselves lucky as they managed to avoid what happens next.

People who suffer from bulimia tend to be intelligent, motivated and want to do everything just right.

Exactly the type of people who DON'T give up on a diet when things get tough, but instead decide to knuckle down and try harder.

Unfortunately, most don't realise that trying harder is the worst thing you can do.

Step 3: You experience a new type of powerful scary hunger

As you continue to restrict, your body becomes more deprived of the nutrition it needs.

All of a sudden, you experience a new powerful hunger.

This is something you have never experienced before.

You no longer feel mild hunger pangs but strong, powerful cravings.

Hunger comes in sudden, powerful bursts.

It's uncontrollable, random and strong.

You feel panicked.

You're scared.

Food has become a battleground.

You are finding it very hard to remain in control.

Your body is crying out for calories and does everything in its power to ensure it gets them.

I call this primal hunger.

Primal hunger seems to make no sense.

We think hunger shouldn't be that strong, that it shouldn't have come on so strong after eating, or we should feel stuffed, not hungry!

It's uncontrollable, random, strong and scary.

At this stage people often say:

"All of a sudden the eating disorder took on a life of its own".

Step 4: You binge on food

Every fibre in our body is screaming, yelling out for you to EAT! EAT! EAT!

You are too tired to fight back any longer.

You are tired of feeling miserable.

You just want a break from the suffering.

You give in and binge on food.

Step 5: You experience the binge trance.

Part of you feels compelled to eat, part of you wants to desperately stop eating.

To be honest, you're really not sure you could stop even if you wanted to.

Watching yourself eat when you feel desperate to stop eating is a frightening experience. So you avoid awareness of how much you are eating. You don't even want to think about it. It doesn't make logical sense, so you just shut it out. Your mind just shuts down and you go into the binge trance.

Step 6: You wrongly believe you are broken.

Because you don't understand primal hunger, you feel confused as to why you would do such a thing.

You don't understand why you are not able to resist food.

You are confused and frightened.

You may begin to believe that you are broken - that there is something wrong with the way you are made.

You may begin to believe that you have an evil part of you that is trying to sabotage your best efforts.

You invent your own dark little monster that is inside you and put the blame on it.

People report feeling like they have been taken over by someone, like an alien, or a devil inside.

Some bulimics call it “Mia”, some call it the “bulimic monster”.

But there is no monster and you are not broken, it’s just very powerful hunger.

Step 7: Out of desperation you purge

You may not do it the first time but as bingeing continues you become more desperate for it to stop.

You feel crazy, out of control,

you are trapped,

And you desperately fear gaining weight.

Fear, panic, confusion and a lack of better alternatives drive you to try a new way of getting rid of the food.

You decide to purge.

This could be self-induced vomiting, laxatives, diet pills or further food restriction.

Purging is such a horrible experience you may feel confident that there is no way you will ever do it again.

But this is just like the smoker who finds their first cigarette disgusting and is confident that they won’t become addicted. Like all smokers before them, eventually - to their total surprise - one day they wake up to discover they are hooked.

(Alternatively, you may be happy to have discovered you can now binge and not worry about weight gain as long as you purge).

Step 8. You get stuck in the bulimic cycle of bingeing and purging.

OK, so you purged.

It’s over with.

You won’t do it again.

But unfortunately purging makes you MORE malnourished.

And being more malnourished makes the binge urge STRONGER.

Purging also creates a blood sugar drop which further encourages more bingeing.

Whereas before you may have been able to resist the urge to binge, now it’s more POWERFUL than ever before.

You may try to fight the binge urge with all your might.

You may muster every ounce of willpower to resist the urge to eat.

But eventually you crumble and decide to binge again.

When the decision to binge is made agitation morphs into exhilarated anticipation.

You are going to get your fix, the battle is finally over. The aftermath is ignored.

Your intelligent mind plots and plans the binge/ purge ritual in an instant.

Then you set out to pursue and accumulate mounds of food from various sources with credible excuses muttered to bewildered check out attendants.

When safely isolated in your binge place you start rapid eating (generally foods you tend to restrict) at break neck speed and you swallow barely chewed food in a state of frenzy.

With cocked ears and darting glances, like a wild animal, you are petrified of being discovered. You go from zero to ten on the fullness scale in a matter of minutes

Food wrappings are stuffed into bags, with shaking hands, to hide the evidence, like an accomplished criminal. Then with thumping heart and sweating brow the nausea starts....

And well, purging worked before so you decide to do it just one more time.

This leads to further stronger binge urges and therefore more purging.

You are now stuck in the binge and purge cycle.

Step 9. You attempt to use willpower to stop bingeing.

Many bulimics attempt to stop bingeing by using their willpower to resist the urge.

We believe that if we hold out long enough and ignore the urge to binge that it will go away.

The problem is that it doesn't go away.

If you are not feeding your body the nutrients it needs the **binge urge will NEVER disappear.**

The fact is willpower is only good for short term goals and it only works for so long. No one - anywhere - has enough willpower to continually resist the urge to binge forever.

Eventually you WILL give in.

This is why the most fervent promises to stop bingeing, often made in the heat of post purge feelings, so often fail.

No matter how hard we try, our **natural defense mechanism, which ensures we eat enough, will override our desire to restrict.**

Willpower alone doesn't work for recovery.

Each time your willpower fails (and it always does eventually) it further reinforces the belief that you are trapped and doomed for a life of bulimia.

You can easily be led to believe that there is something inherently wrong with you; that perhaps you have been born with a defect, that you are lazy, or lack strength **but nothing could be further from the truth!**

Your inability to stop bulimia is NOT based on some character flaw.

Your bulimia has NOTHING to do with your integrity as a person.

IF YOU ARE MALNOURISHED, YOU WILL BINGE.

This will happen to ANYONE on the planet.

This is a VERY normal consequence of not eating enough food.

Some people with bulimia do manage to resist the urge to binge for a long time.

But deep down they are still tortured by nagging thoughts.

They still need to fight off urges to indulge in food.

They may feel like something is missing in their life.

They may also feel that bulimia will always be there in the background, ready to pounce on them in a moment of weakness.

They are never truly FREE from bulimia.

“Is it because I don’t have enough willpower?”

The truth is bulimics tend to have lots of willpower. Probably more than most people, and it doesn’t help them one bit.

Personally, that is why I believe overachievers and perfectionists are more likely to develop eating disorders. In general, they have more motivation and willpower to succeed at a diet. When the diet becomes really challenging, they try harder to resist the urge to eat instead of giving up, and in turn suffer the consequences...

Recovery quote

“This absolutely blew me away, I thought I had no willpower whatsoever but what I have learned in my recovery is that I have LOADS of willpower but it was useless because I was caught in the bulimia trap. Having willpower and being undernourished, even though I was of normal weight, were two things that blew me away”

Step 10. You lose all hope of ever recovering.

If you continually fail at every attempt to recover, after a while you begin to wonder if recovery is even possible.

There is a limit to how many times you can build up your hopes for recovery, only to suffer the pain of having them shattered again and again and again.

Eventually it feels easier to accept your life as a bulimic rather than suffer the additional heartache and misery of continually failing at recovery.

Step 11. Bingeing and purging becomes an emotional crutch.

Bingeing on food causes a flood of endorphins to surge through your brain which can temporarily infuse you with a warm sense of numbness or euphoria.

Over time you learn to binge on food just to experience the endorphin release that comes with it.

Just like a smoker who craves a cigarette when they are feeling stressed,

or a drinker who is nervous and craves a pint of beer in social situations,

you begin to rely on the sense of numbness as an emotional band aid to block out any uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

(Please note: we will explore this in much more detail later)

The sense of numbness brought on by a binge helps you to temporarily block out the reality of living with bulimia and to give your mind a moment’s rest from the suffering.

After a while you begin to wonder how you could possibly manage uncomfortable emotions without your binge fix.

Step 12. You believe you are mentally unwell.

Progressively declining health, constant anxiety, disgust, and slavery, fear of death, not to mention mood swings, body dissatisfaction, food obsession and feeling like you're going mad all take their toll.

Your self-esteem plummets.

Your confidence shatters.

And you worry for your health and your life.

You find it hard to face the reality of what your life has become and you mourn for your lost dreams and aspirations.

Life becomes a desperate show of putting on your "happy face" for fear anyone will see the real you and discover your dark secret.

And worst of all...

You have no idea why any of this happened!

And without any other apparent reason as to why you would do such a thing, you start to wonder if you are mentally unwell.

At least that explains something and takes away the pain of not knowing.

But believing you are mentally unwell gives you an excuse for NEVER recovering.

Step 13. You accept that you are bulimic

Over time you forget what it was like to have a normal relationship with food.

You forget what your old personality felt like.

You forget who you were without bulimia.

It begins to feel like your life has always revolved around bingeing and purging and you accept this as your new reality.

Eventually you may start to plan episodes of bingeing and purging and even look forward to them. You now fully identify yourself as bulimic.

Recovery quote

"Oh my gracious, I did every one of these without even realizing it!" I was at step 12 and just entering step 13 so when I saw each of them laid out IN ORDER i saw that I was a textbook-bulimic sufferer and that you knew exactly how it happened. At this point I thought if they can tell me how I got here they can probably help me out of it! "

It's just a trap

Having bulimia is really like being stuck in a clever trap.

It fools you into thinking you can never recover.

It fools you into believing that you are broken.

It robs you of your self-esteem, your confidence and your life.

Like being stuck in a complex maze.

You may feel like you will never escape and it's easy to believe that you are hopelessly lost.

But like all mazes, there is a way out.

And once you know the way out, you can never get trapped again.

Recovery quote

“ SO TRUE. I always look back and just see DARK. I just felt like I was in a shroud and I'd never get out. BUT I DID! I KNOW KNOW KNOW it's possible!”

Why is primal hunger so powerful?

It may seem strange that when we get too hungry our body creates a crazy “hunger monster” that just wants to gorge on food.

So why does this happen?

There are three essentials we need in life to survive. These are:

1. Air
2. Water
3. Food.

If we do not get enough food, air or water we will die.

To stop us from dying, we have naturally evolved powerful survival mechanisms, over millions of years, to ensure that we eat, drink and breathe.

For example.

Try holding your breath for 60 seconds.

Not only is it extremely uncomfortable, difficult and scary.

But also notice how your whole body and mind feel like they have been taken over by a single thought... BREATHE! BREATHE! BREATHE!

Nothing else matters any more. For those moments your life revolves around air. You become OBSESSED with AIR. You want to BINGE on air. Your urge to breathe becomes STRONGER AND STRONGER. You can't fight it.

If we don't breathe eventually we pass out and naturally start breathing again.

Our survival mechanism overrides our brain and it literally shuts it down.

Your survival mechanism is much more powerful than your thoughts and your willpower. **In a way your survival mechanism is more powerful than you.**

It's the same for water.

We have all seen the movies where someone is lost in the desert and all they can say is, “water!, water!” At that moment, if they were offered the choice between a million dollars or a jug of water, I'm pretty confident they would choose the water.

So why would it be any different if you deprived yourself of food?

It's not.

If anything it's more powerful.

Lets look at some of the more powerful side effects of food restriction. Do any of them look familiar?

1. Extremely powerful urges to binge on food

Just like holding your breath creates massive urges to breathe, restricting your food causes massive, scary, powerful urges to eat lots of food.

2. Powerful cravings for foods rich in sugar and fats

Your body wants calories so it craves sugary fatty food. Chocolate and cheesecake have never looked so good!

3. An increased taste response to sugar

Where normally too much sugar tastes sickeningly sweet, now it seems we never reach the point where it isn't desirable. Our body has actually increased our taste response to sugar so we can eat more of it. It's just another one of the body's clever tricks to ensure we eat more calories.

A scientific study has shown clearly that when a group of normal weight individuals were given a sweet drink to consume, they lost the taste for it after a very short time. The underweight group however, continued to enjoy it for much longer. This explains why chronic dieters and bulimics can go on long binges of sweet foods.

Recovery quote

"So true. Amazing how I take it for granted now that my sugar cravings are gone. I assumed everybody had the same response to sugar I did, and just had amazing willpower! Now that my sugar cravings are gone, I realize how tough it was at the time. I'm so grateful to be on the other side of this."

4. An insatiable appetite

We lose the ability to feel satisfied and this can be really scary.

Where normally we would feel too full, now it seems like we are able to eat and eat and eat and never feel satisfied. Many different research studies have shown that after restrictive eating, most people find that they are unable to stop eating when full.

5. Food obsession

Food is all you can think about. In your car to and from work, while studying, watching TV, or chatting to friends. You may even have food dreams.

6. Cravings for Stimulants

As your energy levels plummet, you turn to stimulants such as coffee, tea, and diet sodas to keep you going and as a defense against "giving into food". What you really need is food energy.

Restrictive eating changes your brain chemistry

Whenever you restrict your food intake you suffer from a host of mental side effects too.

Large-scale studies from reputable universities such as Harvard and Oxford have noted that people on diets can significantly deplete their serotonin levels within three weeks of dieting.

Regardless of your life circumstances or accomplishments, when your serotonin levels drop so do your feelings of self-esteem. As the brain continues to be starved it deteriorates further and becomes even more self-critical.

This leads to outbreaks of unpleasant psychological problems such as obsessive and compulsive behavior, depression, anxiety, cravings, general moodiness and poor motivation.

Restrictive eating (i.e bingeing and purging on food) has caused:

- Your brain chemistry to change.
- The way you think to change.
- Your personality to become altered.

Simply put... food restriction makes you miserable.

Accept the FACT that diets do not work.

You really need to embrace that fact that DIETING IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF ALL OUR WEIGHT AND EATING PROBLEMS.

Diets are continuing to rise in popularity, yet obesity rates have increased 50% over the past decade and eating disorders are more prevalent now compared to what they once were.

More people are dieting and more people are overweight due to the inevitable rebound. We're fatter because we've dieted. If we stop dieting today, we'll lose weight and be a smaller nation.

The diet failure rate is around 95%.

This goes for all diet products and plans out there.

Would you let a brain surgeon who had a 95% failure rate work on your brain?

Would you get onto a plane that had a 95% chance of crashing?

Yet, when the diet fails or if we develop an eating disorder we blame ourselves.

“Anyone who sold any other product with a failure rate as high as dieting would be out of business, probably in jail” (Dale Atrens ‘The power of pleasure’, 2000).

You must accept the FACT that all weight loss diets are scams.

They will NEVER work:

DIETS DO NOT WORK. THEY MAKE YOU MISERABLE. THEY LOWER YOUR SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE. EVERYONE AND ANYONE WHO DIETS WILL EXPERIENCE THIS.

A diet really is one step away from an eating disorder

This table shows the similarities between anorexia, bulimia, and dieting:

SYMPTOMS	ANOREXIA	BULIMIA	CHRONIC DIETING
DESIRE TO BE THIN	YES	YES	YES
PREOCCUPATION WITH FOOD	YES	YES	YES
LOW SELF-ESTEEM	YES	YES	YES
FEAR OF LOSING CONTROL	YES	YES	YES
FEAR OF GAINING WEIGHT	YES	YES	YES
DEPRESSION	SOMETIMES	SOMETIMES	SOMETIMES
EXCESSIVE EXERCISING	OFTEN	OFTEN	OFTEN
PURGING	SOMETIMES	YES	SOMETIMES
LACK OF MENSTRUAL PERIODS	YES	OFTEN	SOMETIMES

The truth is that severe dieters are just one step away from being classified as having a mental illness. All they need to do is try out a new method of purging and just like that they can move from something that is socially acceptable (dieting) to having a socially feared mental illness (bulimia).

“Being sold the message of dieting can produce drastic dieting which can lead to eating disorders. Getting rid of dieting could wipe out **at least** 70% of eating disorders. Get rid of dieting.”
Dr Adrienne Key, Royal College of Psychiatrists

It's a shame it isn't more obvious

So why don't people blame diets more often?

Isn't it obvious they cause problems?

Well, actually not really.

If you hold your breath you will notice the side effects in seconds.

If you go without water you will notice the side effects in hours.

But if you restrict your food it might take days and even weeks to notice the side effects.

And because it takes longer to notice the side effects, it is not as obvious what the cause is.

It's obvious that holding your breath is making you crave air and feel panicked, but it's not so obvious that the reason you are feeling depressed and anxious is because you have been restricting your food intake for the past month.

And because it is not obvious that food restriction is responsible you can mistakenly blame something else as the source of your discomfort and misery.

For example you might instead blame yourself and imagine you are somehow broken, faulty or messed up.

But chances are, you're not. It's just food restriction.

Put the blame on food restriction for a change

Who do we blame for all our misery, pain and suffering?

Do we blame our poor eating habits for this?

No!

Why?

Because we have been brainwashed into thinking dieting is the “right thing to do”.

No one EVER warns us that diets are EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

No one EVER tells us that NEARLY ALL DIETS FAIL.

NO one EVER explains that DIETS CAUSE EATING DISORDERS.

So we blame ourselves,

Or we blame our poor upbringing, our psychology or our genetics.

The truth is:

Bulimia is not YOUR fault!

You simply didn't know any better.

You are not responsible for your eating disorder!

You DID NOT KNOW about the dangers of a restrictive diet. So how can you be to blame?

If anything blame society and their unhealthy obsession with diets.

Just take a moment to let this sink in.

If you are feeling depressed, anxious, moody and have low self-esteem.

If you are experiencing massive binge urges, an insatiable scary appetite, cravings for fatty or sugary foods and you feel uncontrollable around food.

Rather than wondering, “What's wrong with me? Why am I so messed up?”

Rather than despairing and thinking you are broken.

Realize there is NOTHING WRONG with you. You are just experiencing the VERY NATURAL AND NORMAL side effects of a restrictive diet.

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT!

You simply didn't know any better.

Then why is bulimia labeled a mental illness?

No one wants to think they have a mental illness.

It can be a terrifying thought and can really undermine your confidence of ever recovering.

But there is one VERY important point that needs to be made.

Bulimia leads to mental health issues, **not the other way round.**

Bulimia creates a host of psychological side effects.

Being bulimic makes you anxious, depressed, miserable, compulsive and moody.

And because of this bulimia has been labelled a mental illness.

Many who suffer from bulimia wrongly believe they have some psychological issue which has caused their bulimia.

This is not true.

Any psychological problems are a SYMPTOM of bulimia rather than the cause.

(unless you have been suffering from a mental health issue PRIOR to your bulimia.)

The great news is that in recovery every psychological side effect, resulting from bulimia, **can be 100% reversed.**

Recovering from bulimia vastly improves your self-esteem, confidence and well-being without you having to think about it. (isn't that great news!)

The important point here is:

You should not feel hopeless or think that just because bulimia is labelled a mental illness that this somehow changes your ability to recover.

It doesn't.

You can recover and this will **reverse ALL the psychological side effects of bulimia.**

Could it be that there was never anything actually wrong with me in the first place?

Yes.

Think back to when your bulimia began.

- Were you on a diet?
- Were you restricting your food intake for any reason?
- Were you making yourself excessively hungry?

If the answer is yes:

It could be you're not mad, you're not crazy and your eating disorder is not your parent's fault.

It could be you're simply not eating enough food for your body!

By eating enough food for your body there is a strong chance you can resolve any psychological issues you may have.

I know this sounds a bit crazy.

I know I keep on hammering this point home.

But this is so important to understand.

Eating enough food for your body will make you a lot happier.

The mind body connection is profound. If you heal the body you heal the mind.

Whatever triggered you to restrict your food is NOT what is maintaining your bulimia.

At the end of the day, whatever triggered you to restrict your food initially is NOT what is maintaining your bulimia.

You may even find that the feelings and experiences that caused you to restrict your food in the first place are not even relevant in your life anymore. Yet regardless of this, your bulimia still continues to escalate.

Of course if there was a deeper more traumatic experience that you believe triggered you to restrict your food (sexual abuse, death of a spouse, etc.) then therapy and counseling may be essential in helping you to come to peace with those experiences. However those events, as devastating they are, are NOT maintaining your bulimia.

Being in a continual state of primal hunger is what is maintaining your bulimia.

Recovery quote

“That is so true. In my experience, even my body image issues were not very strong after age 24 or so. But my bulimia lasted until age 33, long after the time that I accepted my body shape. True, I still had fear of weight gain, so there were some body image issues. But restricting food is what keeps the bulimic cycle in motion.”

Does my personality type make me more prone to bulimia?

Poor body image, low self-esteem and perfectionism are all personality traits associated with eating disorders. I believe it doesn't matter if you have these personality traits, as long as you do not restrict your food, you will not develop an eating disorder.

I believe the reason people with poor body image, low self-esteem and perfectionist traits are more likely to have eating disorders is because these people are more likely to go on a diet in the false belief that it will make them feel better and happier about themselves.

Also, I believe eating disorders are more prevalent in women, homosexuals and athletes because in general they endure more pressure to diet.

In Summary

- Science proves that every single physical and psychological side effect of bulimia occurs as a result of not eating enough food.
- We now know that food restriction and dieting is the number one cause for eating disorders.
- In just a few steps a "harmless" diet can turn into a life threatening eating disorder:
 - **Step 1:** You go on a diet and experience deprivation.
 - **Step 2:** The diet gets tougher so you restrict more.
 - **Step 3:** You experience a new type of powerful scary hunger
 - **Step 4:** You binge on food
 - **Step 5:** You experience the binge trance.
 - **Step 6:** You wrongly believe you are broken.
 - **Step 7:** Out of desperation you purge
 - **Step 8:** You get stuck in the bulimic cycle of bingeing and purging.
 - **Step 9:** You attempt to use willpower to stop bingeing.
 - **Step 10:** You lose all hope of ever recovering.
 - **Step 11:** Bingeing and purging becomes an emotional crutch.
 - **Step 12:** You believe you are mentally unwell.
 - **Step 13:** You accept that you are bulimic
- Primal hunger is powerful and not something we can overcome with willpower but by relearning how to eat normally it is possible to make a 100% full recovery.
- It doesn't matter what led you to restrict your food initially, by feeding your body the nutrition it needs you can free your mind from obsessive thoughts and compulsions and instead feel happier, confident and more relaxed.
- Restrictive eating changes your brain chemistry and affects your personality but this does not mean you are mentally ill.
- Remember, restoring adequate nutrition can reverse ALL psychological symptoms associated with bulimia.
- Put simply - Diets don't work. All they do is make you miserable, lower your self-esteem and deplete your confidence. In fact extreme dieters are only one step away from being classed as having an eating disorder and mental illness.
- Please understand that you are NOT to blame for your bulimia.

- Restrictive eating is keeping your bulimia alive. Restrictive eating is to blame!
- You did not choose to become bulimic but you can choose to recover.

Stage 1: Re-balancing your body

We can talk about recovery all day, but unless we take real action towards it nothing is going to change.

Luckily, the Bulimia Help Method is all about action.

From now on, the rest of the program is broken up into steps. Each step will give you an actionable task that you need to take. Each step will move you closer to recovery. Complete each step and when you feel ready you can move on to the next.

This stage is all about healing your body and removing the body binge urge.

Your body has forgotten what normal hunger feels like or how to feel satisfied with a normal portion of food. In a way you have forgotten how to respond normally to food and because of this we are prone to massive body binge urges.

It's your job to retrain your body to respond to, process and be satisfied with normal portions of food.

By following the steps in this stage you will notice a MASSIVE, MASSIVE reduction in your body binge urges.

A simple visual image to keep in mind

To help simplify things here is the one visual image I want you to keep in mind to help explain what this stage is all about.

I want you to think of your hunger as a wild dog that hasn't really been looked after too well. A dog that can be unpredictable, aggressive and furious at times.

And it's our job to tame that dog.

To teach it that it has nothing to fear.

That it's OK to start to trust us and even love us.

And to do that we need to nurture, respect and care for the dog.

Over time, if we do our job properly the dog will learn how to be calm, gentle, reliable and trustworthy.

Eventually the dog will stop being a scary wild animal and instead become our snuggly loved pet.

And that's the visual image for this stage.

Taming an aggressive, ferocious, wild dog into our snugly loving pet.

This is a transition stage

“Re-balancing your body” is a transition stage.

This stage will give you a support framework to help re-balance your body and learn how to normalize your eating. But the support framework is only temporary. This is not the way you are going to eat for life. In reality, it's not realistic or healthy for anyone to stay on a meal plan forever.

Eating cannot (and should not) be that “perfect” and inflexible.

Once you get confident and comfortable with all the steps in this stage you won’t have to rely on the support structure so much.

It can help to think of this stage as having training wheels on a bicycle. They offer you support when you need them, but after a while when your confidence and ability improve you can discard them.

We then encourage you to move on to the next stages of recovery. Stage 3 will teach you how to become an Intuitive Eater. This is an extremely powerful and simple way to eat food that will allow you to maintain a healthy weight for life without any pain, suffering, rules or plans.

Step 1: Rest

So let’s do it.

Let’s get stuck into your recovery.

Let’s get started on the beginning of the rest of your life.

To begin with we are going to look at something that many of you might find a little boring and obvious, but it really needs to be addressed as it will help to form the foundation to your recovery.

Bulimia is exhausting.

Really exhausting.

Bulimia drains all aspects of your well-being...

Your are physically exhausted due to bad eating habits, lack of rest, malnutrition, over exercise, purging, etc.

Your are mentally exhausted due to food obsession, cravings, habitual worry, constant state of stress, anxiety, deprivation, etc.

You are emotionally exhausted due to the loneliness, isolation and general sadness caused by bulimia.

Exhaustion can lead to increased anxiety, mood swings and obsessive behavior.

We feel tired, wrecked, drained, burned out.

Simple problems can start to feel like major battles.

We are constantly on edge and small daily stresses can trigger massive anxiety.

We desperately seek some comfort, a break from our worries and from life and this can lead us straight to a binge.

It’s tough being tired all day. When you’re tired, not much seems appealing. Life is dulled and you don’t get much accomplished. Worse still, you don’t have the energy to change the situation. You may have spent years feeling like this.

In order to recover from bulimia, your mind, your body and your emotions need time to recuperate and to heal.

Simply put...you need to rest.

We don't rest enough.

It's easy to ignore rest, other things can feel more important.

You may have a million things to get done, family to care for, TV to watch, work to do.

So we cut rest in favor of these other things because they seem much more important.

This is wrong.

To recover from bulimia you need to make rest a **HIGH PRIORITY** in your life. Your long-term health and sanity depend on it.

If you're feeling unwell and visit your doctor, what's the first thing they usually recommend?

"Put your feet up and have some rest. Take a few days off work."

Every doctor in the world knows if you are not feeling well then you should **REST**.

Rest allows your body the time it needs to **HEAL**.

Rest gives your body time to **RECOVER**.

How to add REST into your life

Here are a few strategies for adding more rest into your life:

Slow down

Are you stuck in a rushed mindset? Are you running around like a headless chicken with no time for yourself?

It is time to let go of the obsession with speed, and instead slow down, stop rushing, and take a big breather.

For the next 2 weeks I want you to make an effort to slow down.

Try to do every activity in your life a little gentler.

A little softer,

a little more relaxed.

Cut back on commitments, put space between things, allow yourself to have a slower pace. Your energy levels will thank you.

Hopefully after 2 weeks you will notice the benefits and continue this habit.

Avoid taking on any unnecessary responsibilities.

Everyone has stress in their lives, but during recovery, try to avoid additional stress as much as you can. Do your best to go a little easier and to not place any heavy demands on yourself.

If possible remove any unnecessary stress from your life. Learn to say "NO" to unrealistic demands. Hold back from any activity that will cause any unnecessary stress.

Take 10 minutes to think about what stresses you during the day.

What weekly occurrences stress you out?

What people, activities, things cause stress in your life?

Make a Top 10 list and then decide which of them can be eliminated. If a stressor can not be weeded out completely see if you can come up with a few ways to make it less stressful.

Allow for some downtime every day

Don't be afraid to take breaks and timeout during the day. You need to rest, and a 20 minute nap during the day can be extremely beneficial.

Recovery quote

"I also think that allowing this kind of down time/ relaxation and knowing it's okay to slow down can be one of the first steps in learning how to care for yourself and how to respond to your own needs with compassion."

Get between 7- 8 hours sleep

Most people need somewhere between 7 and 8 hours of sleep every night. If your body is chronically sleep-deprived, your levels of cortisol (a stress hormone) will be elevated throughout the day. High cortisol levels are associated with an increased appetite and an increase in cravings (especially for sugary or starchy foods).

In addition, without adequate rest, you may be more inclined to eat to keep yourself awake.

Getting adequate sleep lowers stress and reduces the binge urge, so make sure you are getting your 7-8 hours each night.

Recovery quote

"I absolutely needed at least 7 hours sleep a night. It made such a huge difference and if I didn't get my sleep I was prone to binge urges the next day."

Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and drugs

Alcohol

Alcohol is a MASSIVE trigger for bulimia.

People tend to find it hard to control their eating after drinking alcohol, so if you cannot drink moderately (maximum 1 alcoholic drink daily), do not drink at all while you are trying to establish a regular pattern of eating.

Caffeine

Be smart with caffeine. Bulimics tend to drink a lot of diets sodas, coffees and tea to keep going, which is no substitute for food energy. Excessive caffeine raises stress hormone levels, increases anxiety, and interferes with sleep quality. Try to reduce the amount of caffeine you drink throughout the day.

Drugs

Obviously, it goes without saying that you should refrain from all illegal drugs during recovery. They really do not help.

Put your needs first.

Put your needs first. This is your time to nurture you.

You might feel selfish putting your needs first. But this is not selfish, this is the most **GENEROUS** thing you can do for your friends and family.

Once you recover your energy levels and your well-being will soar. Everyone in your life will benefit from a happier, healthier energized you so do not feel guilty about doing it.

Please do not ignore the importance of rest.

You may have many legitimate reasons as to why you've failed to prioritise rest up until now, but please don't pass this step and consider it boring, obvious or something you don't think you can do. There are no magic pills to cure bulimia only practical useful advice.

Rest is very important for your recovery, it needs to become a top priority, no matter how busy your life may be.

So rather than using a busy and demanding lifestyle as an excuse not to rest, instead, from this moment on, consider the ways that you can begin to prioritise rest by problem solving any of those excuses.

Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it and be ready to delegate responsibilities.

In Summary

- Bulimia puts your body in a distressed state. In the distressed state your anxiety, mood swings and obsessive behavior are all vastly amplified.
- A few simple steps to reduce this state include:
- Take your supplements.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and drugs.
- Get between 7-8 hours sleep.
- Make relaxation exercises a habit.
- Simplify your life.
- Problem solve any "rest excuses" so you can make the time to rest each day.

Step 2: Avoid purging.

In this step we will explore some strategies to help you avoid purging.

Perhaps the most effective strategy to stop purging is just to realise how ineffective it truly is.

The fact is purging doesn't work for weight loss or even weight maintenance.

This may come as a surprise to you.

Purging doesn't help to control your weight and in fact in the **long run can lead to weight gain.**

This isn't just for self induced vomiting.

This is for ALL types of purging.

All methods of purging are highly ineffective at removing calories from the body.

Lets explain further by looking at each type of purging individually.

Vomiting

The main reason people vomit is to reduce weight gain after a binge.

Let's pop that bubble right now.

Many people are amazed to realize that purging still leaves a lot of calories in the body.

One study found that around 1000-1200 calories remained in the body regardless of the size of the binge. This happened even when participants purged straight after bingeing (Kaye, Weltzin, Hsu, McConaha, & Bolton 1993).

In a study conducted at the Pittsburgh Human Feeding Laboratory, 18 bulimic women were asked to binge and vomit as they normally would, while the calories they consumed were carefully monitored.

After vomiting, researchers calculated the amount of calories purged and compared it to the amount of calories eaten. They discovered that while the average binge consisted of 2131 calories, the women only managed to purge an average of 979 calories by vomiting.

Recent scientific studies have also suggested that food absorption can begin much earlier on in the digestive system of a bulimic person than a non-bulimic person.

Even if you vomit immediately after a binge and try to empty all the stomach contents, (studies have proven) your body goes on to absorb at least 40% to 75% of the calories.

Maybe think of it this way: After a binge/ purge cycle your body retains the calories equivalent to drinking 1.25 cups of honey! (1200 calories)

So, for all the pain, suffering, shame and disgust you go through, a large portion of calories will always remain. **No matter how hard you try your body will retain calories.**

Chances are the number of calories absorbed from a binge even after vomiting is **greater** than the number that would have been absorbed on a binge-free day.

By bingeing and purging you are consuming more calories than you would if you ate normally.

Doesn't it make more sense to learn to eat normally instead?

Vomiting only encourages **MORE** bingeing

Most bulimics don't realise that vomiting encourages more bingeing.

Let's take a look at what happens to your blood sugar as a result of a purge.

1. After a binge your blood sugar levels increase rapidly and this causes your body to produce insulin (the hormone responsible for keeping your blood sugar levels in check).
2. Your body thinks it will need this insulin to deal with the sugar it expects to absorb from the food you have just eaten.
3. But vomiting, although highly ineffective at removing a lot of calories from the body, does get rid of some of this food and potential sugar, meaning you end up with way too much insulin in your system.

4. Elevated levels of insulin in your body cause blood sugar levels to fall very rapidly, to sub-normal levels.

5. This extreme drop in blood sugar results in a message being sent to your brain that tells you more food is needed resulting in cravings for carbohydrate based foods rich in sugar and/or starch.

If you have ever noticed stronger binge urges the day after purging you now know that a drop in your blood sugar is to blame.

Vomiting puts a serious strain on your body,

It won't come as a surprise that vomiting up your food has adverse effects on your health. Here are some of the more common side effects:

- Dehydration
- Electrolyte imbalances
- Salivary gland enlargement
- Tearing and bleeding of the esophagus
- Erosion of tooth enamel
- Gastro-intestinal problems such as reflux, heartburn, bloating, constipation and/or diarrhoea.

If you are vomiting, even infrequently, it is important to see your doctor for regular check-ups. Electrolyte imbalance can cause cardiac arrest, and tears in the esophagus can be fatal if vomit leaks into the lungs.

A little more about oral damage

When you vomit, the gastric acid from your stomach enters your mouth and erodes tooth enamel, which is the hard covering that protects your teeth. When tooth enamel is eroded, your teeth become damaged. Dental damage can occur after only six months of frequent vomiting.

Oral changes can include:

- Chemical erosion of tooth enamel
- Thermal hypersensitivity (involving increased sensitivity to hot and cold foods)
- Enlargement of the salivary glands
- Brittle and translucent teeth.

As long as you continue to vomit, follow the guidelines below to minimize damage to your teeth:

- Do not brush your teeth immediately after vomiting. This will cause further abrasion to tooth enamel.
- Rinse your mouth with water or a mixture of baking soda and water after vomiting. The baking soda neutralizes the acid in your mouth.
- Some people have a sensitivity to baking soda and instead may want to try a solution of salt in water.
- Floss and brush teeth daily to remove plaque.
- Use fluoride toothpaste to reduce decay and tooth sensitivity.
- If damage is considerable, teeth may need restoring with resins or crowns.

It is recommended that you talk to your dentist. Your dentist is there to help you with your teeth and not to judge you. Also, your dentist will be able to provide you with the best advice if s/he has the full picture about factors affecting your dental care. Remember that if your dental health is left unchecked it will continue to deteriorate even once you stop purging.

Recovery Comment

“From a personal perspective, the fact that I have to look at my damaged teeth every day reminds

me of the pain and suffering caused by bulimia. This is irreversible and is a visual reminder that bulimia is not an option."

Strategies that will help you to stop purging

Realize it is pointless.

Realize purging is pointless and over time may even lead to weight gain. Remember, by purging you are ensuring your body is staying in a primal hunger state and primal hunger always, I repeat 'ALWAYS' leads to more bingeing.

The good news is that by stopping purging NOW, over time the desire to binge will be GREATLY REDUCED.

Create some after meal activities.

When you finish eating, distract yourself.

Find an activity you can at least mildly engross yourself in so that you won't dwell on what it is you have just eaten. This could be anything at all, write a blog, tidy your bedroom, take the dog for a walk - anything that can take your mind off purging! It will feel difficult to impossible at first, but it does get easier with time.

A 10 minute Delay

If you feel uncomfortable after a meal think to yourself:

"OK I feel very on edge and uncomfortable right now, but, instead of getting upset about this like I always do, I am going to accept the experience fully for the next 10 minutes."

Remind yourself it is only for 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes reassess how you feel.

If possible see if you can withhold purging for another 10 minutes.

Over time try to increase the length of time you refrain from purging. By adopting this approach even just once a day, you will increase your acceptance of how you feel and create a very strong momentum for full recovery.

Don't put too much pressure on yourself

If you do purge, don't panic, you are not expected to just stop. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to "never purge again." We are all human, and no one is perfect, so don't expect yourself to be any different. It will take time before you are able to completely resist the urge to purge. Know that this is normal, you will get there eventually!

Break your day into smaller chunks

Some people purge after eating anything at all while others purge at specific times or after eating certain foods. Sometimes it can be overwhelming to think about not purging for an entire day so

instead try dividing your day into six sections. Then eat your planned meal or snack for each section and just focus on not purging for that section of the day.

Keep yourself busy

This isn't a long term solution, but when starting out in recovery it can be helpful to make a plan for each part of the day so your time is not idle. Keeping yourself busy can work really well as a distraction.

Recovery quote

"This is so useful. I remember when whole days used to just disappear in bp cycles when I was working from home on my thesis. Making a plan for each part of the day so that your time is not idle can be really useful even if it's just as simple as 8am go for a walk, 9am catch up on email, 10am, coffee, read paper etc..."

Don't drink too much during meal times

Of course it is essential that you keep yourself hydrated, but you may wish to try to avoid or limit drinking during meal times until you are more comfortable with keeping food in your stomach again. This reduces the volume in your stomach and helps you to feel less full.

Don't have any excuse to visit the bathroom after eating

Try to make sure that there is no reason for you to visit the bathroom for at least 30 minutes to an hour after your meal because sometimes just seeing the visual trigger of the toilet can push you over the edge.

Laxatives

For weight loss, very few things are as ineffective as laxatives. In fact I'm surprised it's not common knowledge how useless they really are.

Absorption of calories occurs high in the digestive system, whilst laxatives and diuretics influence the lower area. Studies show that laxatives ONLY decrease caloric consumption by about 12% (Bo-linn, Santa Ana, Morawski, & Fordtran, 1983).

After taking laxatives it may appear that you've lost weight, but any weight loss you do notice is due to water loss and dehydration only. It will rapidly return once you become rehydrated. Due to constant dehydration, your body starts to hoard water which can make you feel bloated and uncomfortable.

Confusing thirst for hunger is one of the most common reasons for overeating. By being constantly dehydrated, you are much more likely to believe you are hungry when you are not and therefore eat more.

Long term side effects of laxative use include:

Serious and permanent damage to the lining of the bowel and more sluggish functioning.

- Bloating
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Serious electrolyte imbalances.

How to stop abusing laxatives

Coming off laxatives can be challenging especially if you have been dependent on them for some time. You may worry that you will be unable to have a natural bowel movement, that you will gain weight or not be able to cope without the “empty feeling” that laxatives can provide. However these fears can be replaced with the knowledge and understanding that you are not benefiting from using laxatives and your health can improve dramatically when you stop.

1. Cutting your laxatives down gradually

It's best to start by cutting your laxatives down gradually. Think about the amount you take currently and set yourself a realistic reduction goal. Then each week review this goal, setting yourself a new lower target until you are finally at a stage where you feel comfortable to completely cut them out.

2. Give your body time

Your body needs time to regulate itself and relearn how to respond naturally. This may take some time, and you may find yourself getting a little anxious when you do not have a bowel movement. It is normal to experience feelings of bloating and discomfort but these feelings will eventually pass as your natural bowel movements come back.

3. Take your doctor's advice.

It is recommended that you see your doctor for a checkup, especially if you are combining laxatives with other purging methods. It can sometimes be difficult when approaching a doctor about something so private. However remember doctors sit day in and day out in their practice and see thousands of patients a year. Doctors also deal with hundreds of health issues, to them you are just another patient with or without another diagnosis to attach to, it is their job to look after you and provide the best advice possible.

Tips for natural bowel movement

So in the meantime make sure you:

- Eat enough fiber: high-fiber items like whole grains, fresh fruits, and fresh vegetables keep your bowel movements frequent;
- Eat the skin of fruit and vegetables, especially apples; they are high in fiber and potassium.
- Figs and golden linseeds (with adequate fluids) are excellent natural aids to regularity.
- A cup of hot water with a dash of lemon juice in the morning can help stimulate muscle contractions in the large intestine.
- Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated.
- Caffeine can dehydrate you; caffeine pulls water out of your body instead of adding it to cells and tissues, so it's best to stay away from caffeine for the mean time.
- Walking and light exercise can help get your intestinal muscles working and generate movement.

It is normal to experience a small level of bloating while your body is re-balancing from laxative abuse.

Diuretics

Diuretics 100% just do not work.

They have NO EFFECT whatsoever on calorie consumption. The only thing they do is make you

lose water, which is quickly returned when you drink again.

Excessive Exercise

Exercise is good for you, right? So that means that more exercise must be better for you?

Yes, you can be forgiven for thinking that, but unfortunately it's not true.

Muscle is the best natural fat burner we have and it helps to regulate your metabolism. Excessive exercise does not burn off fat, but in fact actually breaks down muscle fiber. This destroys muscle mass rather than building it, especially if your body isn't getting enough nutrition. This in turn actually **LOWERS** your metabolism, helping your body retain more calories from any food consumed.

Also excessive exercise is only going to increase hunger, which can result in **MORE** bingeing and purging. Excessive exercise does **NOT** burn off all the calories from a binge.

In summary excessive exercise **REDUCES** your body's ability to burn off fat, **LOWERS** your metabolism and **ENCOURAGES** more bingeing.

More importantly for your bulimia recovery...

too much exercise will force your body to remain trapped in a state of primal hunger which means it will be impossible for you to overcome those powerful body binge urges.

Excessive exercise isn't very good for your health.

Excessive exercise:

- Can damage tendons, ligaments, bones, cartilage, and joints.
- Leaves no time for your body to heal from minor injuries, meaning long-term damage is more likely.
- Can disrupt the balance of hormones in your body. This puts you at an increased risk of osteoporosis and can cause women to develop amenorrhea.
- May cause scarring of the heart and heart rhythm abnormalities.
- An even more serious risk is the stress that excessive exercise can place on the heart, particularly if you're restricting your food intake, vomiting and using diet pills or laxatives.
- Psychologically, despite the fact that moderate exercise helps alleviate the symptoms of depression and anxiety, too much exercise can actually cause an increase in anxiety and depression while also lowering self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

If you are severely underweight

If you are severely underweight then any amount of exercise can be very dangerous. Medical professionals advise that severely underweight people do not exercise and even keep all physical movements to a minimum.

It is recommended that adults engage in 30 minutes of low-to-moderate intensity exercise each day. If you enjoy more active exercise, it is recommended that you engage in 1 hour of more vigorous exercise 3-4 days a week.

Cutting back on excessive exercising

If you love exercise or depend on it to help you cope with bingeing then it can be difficult to imagine cutting back.

But there comes a time in recovery when you have to face those fears. Realize that those fears have no basis in reality. **Excessive exercise is hurting you**, not helping you.

It's okay if you feel you can't stop excessively exercising straight away. Instead set yourself short, manageable and realistic reduction goals. Start by reducing the duration and or intensity of your workouts by a set amount each week.

At first this will feel very challenging. Your anxiety is likely to increase and you can experience lots of unpleasant emotions, but do try to stick with it. **Cutting back is the BEST thing you can do for your health, happiness and recovery.**

Recovery quote

"While exercise can be a great way to unwind be honest with yourself as to what is a reasonable amount. Be careful that you don't overdo it. I had to set a limit on the exercise or it would become another addiction for me like bulimia. 3-4 times a week. I time myself. I cannot stay at the gym for more than an hour, from start to finish. When the end of the hour comes, I say no matter what, you are done. On the other days, I just find a way to be active: Taking walks, playing with my kids. Just important not to obsess."

Periods of fasting

Many people with bulimia fast from food after a binge episode. Periods of fasting is another form of restrictive eating. If you continue to fast you will ALWAYS suffer from massive body binge urges. You will NEVER recover from bulimia. Your metabolism will NEVER recover.

Do NOT fast after a binge, it only prolongs your bulimia.

If you have any doubts about this, read over the first section of the book again and remind yourself of the dangers of restrictive eating.

Realize that Purging does NOT work

Think of it this way, if purging was so effective why would most people with bulimia tend to be of average or above average weight?

If I could shout it from the roof tops I would...

"Purging doesn't help you lose weight!"

"Purging doesn't help you lose weight!"

"Purging doesn't help you lose weight!"

So what does purging really do?

Let's look at the harsh reality of it for a second.

- Purging keeps your bulimia alive.
- Purging creates massive body binge urges.
- Purging is destroying your life and making you miserable.

- **Purging is slowly and painfully KILLING YOU.**

You can stop purging and NOT gain any weight.

Remember that with any type of bingeing and purging, chances are you are consuming more calories than if you just ate normal portions of food throughout the day.

The point is:

It is MUCH BETTER to eat normal portion sized meals and NOT BINGE, than it is to restrict your food intake, then binge and purge.

Ignore your fear and listen to your logic

By truly believing this, you are helping to remove the ANXIETY and FEAR of having food in your stomach.

It is that ANXIETY, FEAR and PANIC that leads to purging in the first place.

The truth is there is NO NEED TO PANIC AT ALL!

Your body can handle the food.

In fact, your body WILL actually thank you for feeding it by reducing your body binge urges!

This can feel like a big leap of faith...

It's okay if you can't fully embrace these new ideas immediately because building up this new trust does take time.

You will likely still feel anxious with food in your stomach for a while, but it is something that you do need to consciously work at.

Eventually you will learn that YOU CAN TRUST YOUR BODY and you will be rewarded with a significant reduction in binge urges.

“I’m worried I’ll develop binge eating disorder if I stop purging”

Binge eating disorder is a very serious and debilitating eating disorder in its own right, and often people in recovery from bulimia fear that when they stop purging they are simply replacing their bulimia with binge eating disorder.

At the start of recovery some people do successfully stop bingeing and purging immediately, most however start by stopping purging and then gradually reducing episodes of bingeing over time.

When you stop purging it does take time for those urges to binge to lessen, so for some weeks or months you may find yourself bingeing but not purging - just like someone with binge eating disorder would.

This scares many people into believing that they are simply exchanging one eating disorder for another, but actually this is a very normal phase of recovery. No one expects you to immediately stop bingeing and purging forever at this stage, that would be unrealistic. So instead we suggest you seek gradual progress.

The bottom line is that stopping episodes of purging but continuing to experience episodes of bingeing does NOT mean that you are developing binge eating disorder.

It means you are making PROGRESS!

In Summary

- Purging actually makes you hungry and much more likely to binge. By bingeing you are eating much more food than normal.
- Studies have shown that bingeing and purging can lead to weight gain. (Agras and Apple 1997, p52).
- Purging ensures you are forever living in a state of malnutrition and distressed hunger.
- Purging does NOT work and is a highly ineffective weight management tool.
- Purging with self-induce vomiting eliminates some calories but one study found 1200 CALORIES were retained no matter the size of the binge (Kaye et al., 1993).
- Purging with diuretics provides NO caloric loss at all; any change in weight is just water loss.
- Intense exercise does not burn off fat, but in fact over exercising actually breaks down muscle fiber and lowers your metabolism.
- Distract yourself after eating. This helps you to relax so that you won't dwell on what it is you have just eaten.
- Create a new after meal plan that will help you to combat these urges.

Step 3: Eat at least every 3 hours.

A lot of bulimics tend to have a chaotic, disordered eating schedule.

They skip meals,

They fast for hours,

The end of every meal or snack becomes the beginning of an undetermined period of deprivation. Physiologically, this encourages a powerful urge to overeat at every opportunity possible.

We need to retrain our mind and body to expect food often and regularly. To do this we need to feed ourselves at least every three hours.

By doing this you are telling your body:

“You don’t have to force me to binge on large amounts of food now, because I will provide you with more food later”.

It will take time for your body to TRUST that it can have more food later. But if you continue to eat something at least every three hours your body will become biologically reconditioned to know that it will always have access to food.

If you are worried that eating often will lead to weight gain, keep in mind that eating regularly is one of the BEST things you can do to maintain a healthy weight, as it provides a **massive boost to your metabolism**.

Studies show that people who skip meals during the day and then eat lots in the evening, tend to be more overweight than those who eat regularly throughout the day.

Eating regularly also helps to stabilize your blood sugar levels which will automatically suppress your appetite.

And best of all, by eating something at least every three hours you can expect a MASSIVE reduction in your body binge urges.

The basic format of eating every 3 hours

The basic format for this is to eat three meals and three snacks every day, ensuring you eat at least every three hours within your day.

It can help to set your times prior to starting. An example of this would be:

Breakfast time: 8:00am

A snack for morning tea time: 10:30am

Lunch time: 1:00pm

A snack in the afternoon time: 3:30pm

Dinner time: 6:00pm

A snack after dinner time: 8:30pm

Please note that the meals **do not need to be exactly 3 hours apart**. We just need to ensure that there is NO MORE THAN 3 hours between meals.

I would suggest you start this immediately...

Whatever time of day it is, it doesn't matter - from this moment onwards; you will eat something at least every three hours.

“How rigid should I be with the preset times?”

It is important to stick to your scheduled times, but it is OK to be a little flexible.

Some people prefer to eat exactly at their preset time, while others prefer a little flexibility and perhaps eat half an hour either side of their preset times.

Why not try out both options and find what works best for you.

“But, what will I eat?”

At this stage **don't feel pressured to eat something that will cause anxiety or something you know you will have trouble keeping down**.

Don't worry about eating normally.

Don't worry if your food choices look crazy.

In time, it will all be okay, but for now, stay safe and stick to foods you feel comfortable with. If you know certain foods can trigger a binge then avoid them for now.

Many people are used to skipping meals, so eating at least every 3 hours might seem like a big enough challenge at first, without also worrying about what to eat. We will get to that later.

“What if I am not hungry?”

It doesn't matter.

Even if you do not feel hungry, **when it is time to eat then you should eat.**

At this stage you simply cannot trust your hunger signals. Bulimia has made your internal food regulatory system unreliable. Eating in a mechanical way like this is important until you are able to trust your own hunger and satiety cues.

“What if I don’t feel satisfied after eating?”

In the beginning, expect to have some difficulty feeling satisfied after eating. This is because it takes time for your body to experience and understand feelings of satiety again. **Realise that this is very normal and continue with your meal plan as is.**

What if I am hungry between meals?

If you find yourself hungry between meals then the first thing to address is whether you are eating enough food. Most people find the urge to eat between meals reduces dramatically once they increase their portion sizes and begin eating foods from all of the major food groups.

Another thing to bear in mind, is that in the early stages of recovery it’s normal to feel false hunger or emotional hunger, which makes you want to graze in-between meals. But this kind of grazing will only help to keep your bulimia alive, so do aim to stick to those set meal and snack times as much as you can.

Of course if you feel you can’t quite make it 3 hours between meals and snacks that’s okay too. Try reducing the gap slightly and see if it helps.

“Should I ever listen to my own hunger cues at this stage?”

It can be very hard to know when to start trusting your body to tell you when it is hungry again. Generally at the start of recovery you need to focus on eating at least every 3 hours regardless of how hungry you feel.

Don't worry too much about relying on those natural hunger cues just yet; you can learn to be more intuitive as time goes on. Remember it can take 3-6 months and sometimes longer for your natural hunger cues to really start working again. Until then it is important to start giving your body the nutrition it needs.

“I can’t eat that amount of food, what should I do?”

You decide the portion size.

For now stick to the portion size that you feel comfortable with in order to reduce your anxiety and the temptation to purge. You must take your time as your body learns to digest food again.

The goal at this stage is to start getting used to feelings of food in your stomach. If you are struggling to keep the food down, make the portions smaller. In time, when your body adjusts to regular food, you can increase the amount.

“I find 3 large meals a day too difficult. I'm not used to having that much food in my stomach.”

That's no problem, a lot of people find eating 3 large meals too difficult at first, so instead of 3 main meals and 3 snacks have 6 small meals.

Many find this approach a lot easier and it's just as effective. So if you feel you'd be more comfortable eating 6 smaller meals then please do so.

“Why am I MORE hungry after eating?”

Unfortunately at this stage in recovery your hunger might not make logical sense. Sometimes eating a meal can make you MORE hungry than before.

Accept that this is another part of your recovery and in time your body will adjust and respond normally to food.

“What if I binge?”

Firstly don't panic; you haven't blown it!

At this early stage in recovery you are not expected to just stop bingeing.

If you do binge, continue your meal plan for the rest of the day.

Yes I know this is challenging but the BEST WAY to prevent further loss of control is to continue to eat at least every 3 hours.

Remember if you decide to restrict and skip a meal you will only encourage more binge eating.

It can help to break the day up into 6 portions to represent each meal. If you do binge on one of these portions don't look at it as if the day has been ruined. It hasn't, you still have 5 more opportunities to continue to eat every 3 hours.

“What if I miss a meal?”

Many people become extremely anxious if they miss a meal but missing one meal isn't going to be an issue. There are plenty of reasons why you might miss a meal. A late bus, an office meeting, or you simply forgot.

If it's now dinner time and you haven't eaten since lunch, eat your dinner and be wary that you may need to increase your portion size to make up for the missed food.

This will be very challenging at first, but it WILL get easier.

Please try hard not to miss any meals (although, don't beat yourself up if you do).

Recovery Comments

“I found that, after adopting structured eating, I tend to get very anxious when I have to miss a snack or meal. The solution for me was to make sure I always have a small snack at hand e.g. an apple. This definitely takes away some of the stress and not to mention it calms binge urges dramatically!”

“Do I need to see a Doctor?”

Please remember: This program is meant as GENERAL ADVICE ONLY; it's not a professional opinion or advice.

If you have very low body weight or are underweight, have any deficiencies, intolerance's, injuries, that may affect your diet in any way then you should MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR DOCTOR.

Similarly, if you encounter complications with structured eating, such as oedema (swelling of extremities), chest pains, palpitations, aches, and so on, GO TO YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY. Complications are unlikely, but it's always best to get checked .

“Should I record what I eat in a food journal?”

Some people love to journal food intake and others don't.

Some eating disorder treatments strongly recommend it, but to be honest I have always been on the fence about it.

If you find it helpful I recommend you do it. If you would prefer not to, or don't think it will be helpful then it's fine not to do it.

If you are not sure, I would recommend tracking your food intake for just 3 consecutive days a week. Try this for a few weeks and see if you find it helpful in your recovery.

The main benefit of food journaling is to help troubleshoot your recovery. A food journal can give you a much clearer picture of your binge urge triggers while allowing you to see the link between structured eating and a reduction of those urges. It can also help you to discover further changes that will be helpful for your recovery.

Recovery quote

"When I first began structured eating in January, it was very tough and for the first 4-5 weeks of it, all I thought about was what am I going to have at my next meal? After about 5 weeks of structured eating, it was unlike anything I've ever experienced before. I just didn't think about the next meal! Trust me on this; I've been bulimic for 16 years so I did not think this would happen. If you keep going strong though, and don't give up, even if you have little slip ups, your body will adapt and given a few weeks, your brain will automatically stop thinking like this. I didn't think it would happen either, but it did!"

In Summary

- Eat something at least every three hours during the day.
- Choose foods that you are comfortable with and you enjoy.
- Even if you are not hungry, when it is time to eat you should eat.
- Don't worry about trusting your own hunger cues at this stage.
- Start with portion sizes you are comfortable with.
- Understand that it takes time to re-balance your body.
- If you have a slip up or relapse keep going!
- This can seem like a massive challenge at first but you will adapt!

Step 4: Balance your food intake.

You won't be surprised to know that eating a range of food from all the food groups is good for you. What may surprise you is how beneficial this strategy can be for bulimia recovery.

For example, if you tend to binge in the evenings adding protein to your breakfast (eg scrambled eggs) can make you more satisfied throughout the day and greatly reduce those evening binge urges.

Bulimics tend to eat the same familiar (safe) foods over and over. This can lead to poor nutrition because the variety is not wide enough.

If you eliminate whole groups of foods (e.g. carbohydrates or fats) your body will still be physically deprived.

For example if you are calcium deprived you may find yourself bingeing on cartons of ice cream and not knowing why. In this case, it is very important to assess whether your diet is giving you the right nutrients that it needs to function properly.

It is highly recommended that you see a Registered Dietitian for an assessment if you think you may be lacking nutrients.

Stabilizing your blood sugar in recovery

A study published in the International Journal of Eating Disorders found that when blood sugar levels were too low the desire to binge on carbohydrate (sugar) rich foods would intensify.

In a separate study, 20 bulimic women were put on a sugar-stabilizing diet to see if it would help with their urges to binge and purge. Within three weeks ALL of the 20 participants had completely stopped bingeing and ALL of them remained free from binges in the long term too.

When your blood sugar levels get too low it is very natural to start craving chocolate, cookies, and other typical “binge foods” that will enable you to replenish your blood sugar levels quickly.

By eating regular meals and snacks made up from fats, proteins and complex carbohydrates you will be able to stabilize erratic blood sugar levels, in turn reducing these cravings.

Creating a simple meal plan

We are going to create a meal plan. In the effort to keep things simple and therefore easier to follow the basic pattern for each meal will include:

- A serving of complex carbohydrates
- A serving of protein
- A serving of fat.

Each meal will have **a combination of all 3 food groups** and therefore ensure your body is getting the nutrition it so desperately craves. Expect another reduction in your body binge urges here.

Lets explore a little further why each food group is so important.²

FAT

Eating fat helps to curb overeating and allows you to feel full, content and satisfied after a meal.

Fat induces satiety via a hormonal response in your body that tells you to stop eating. In response to the presence of fat in a meal a hormone called cholecystokinin (CCK for short) is released into the blood and sends a signal to the brain that lets your body know you’re full.

You do NOT need to fear fat

By avoiding fat in your diet you may think you have your best intentions at heart, but it just doesn’t work that way.

The more you begin to fear fat and the more you avoid fat, the more likely you will be to binge.

For example, did you know that you need fat in your diet in order to get the full health benefits from vegetables and to absorb important nutrients from other non-fat foods?

Not long ago the scientific community thought that fat in the diet was bad and that a low fat diet was healthiest, but now we know that is just not true. Fat can actually help to improve your health.

It is now increasingly recognized that the “low-fat campaign” has been based on little scientific evidence and may have caused unintended health consequences.

While we know that too many saturated and unhealthy fats can be detrimental to health, it is important to remember that healthy fats are vital for health, disease prevention and recovery.

Fat free food doesn't fill you up for long

Popular bulimic foods like popcorn and rice cakes are essentially fat free. They might fill up your stomach but they offer very little satisfaction and satiety. More importantly, they don't keep you full for very long and they don't provide you with all of the nutrients that you need to be healthy.

Recommended guidelines

A moderate intake of FAT is 65 grams per day (this is equivalent to 30% of a 2000 calorie diet). Although you should know that in Mediterranean cultures where people get around 40-45% of calories from fat, there are lower rates of chronic disease when compared with people who get a smaller percentage of total calories from fat.

Getting a little more of your calories from fat at the start of recovery can also help to reduce that initial bloating that happens within the first few weeks.

Include some fat in each of your three main meals.

You should aim to include some fat in each of your three main meals.

We don't want to get obsessed with healthy and unhealthy fats so rather than thinking about fats that you should limit, try instead to focus on all of those wonderful healthy fats that will help you in recovery.

Here are a few suggestions you can start putting into your diet today:

- Almonds - great to snack on and good source of omega 3.
- Avocados - high in heart-healthy oleic acid.
- Egg yolks - despite what you've heard, eggs (including the yolk) are good for you! They're rich in omega-3' and contain the full spectrum of amino acids, and have plenty of vitamins your body needs.
- Fish - Wild-caught salmon is a great choice.
- Walnuts - another great choice for snacking.
- Cheese – although dairy may contain more saturated fats it also has a whole range of health benefits. For example 2 servings of dairy per day may reduce your risk of certain cancers.
- Extra virgin olive oil – A great source of vitamin E, Extra virgin olive oil has been related to a decreased risk for coronary heart disease and cancer while having a positive effect on cholesterol levels.
- Nut Butters - Peanut butter, cashew butter, almond butter, etc.

Recovery quote

“Nuts and nut butters are a great source of both protein and fat, including them part of your

snacks can really help you to curb those binge urges!”

Carbohydrates

When we restrict carbohydrates a chemical [Neuropeptide Y (NPY)] in our brain triggers a drive to eat them. This is why carb-rich foods are such popular binge foods.

Carbohydrates are given a really bad press and are often portrayed as a food that we should fear. Some people say they are bad for you, make you gain weight and that you should stay away from them at all costs, this is complete nonsense. The reality is you need carbohydrates in your diet.

Carbohydrates provide energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and fiber. Plus, our bodies just love them!

Carbohydrates provide us with a lot of dietary fiber. Fiber slows down the absorption of other nutrients eaten at the same meal, including carbohydrates. When absorption is slowed energy is released more gradually, meaning less likelihood that you'll experience erratic blood sugar changes, meaning you're less prone to bingeing.

Carbohydrates play a critical role in brain health.

If you are a woman then you are especially vulnerable to how carbohydrates affect your mood. Serotonin, the main neurotransmitter for mood and appetite regulation, depends on carbohydrates for synthesis, so when you restrict carbohydrates you put yourself at risk of even lower serotonin levels.

Great for snacks

Carbohydrates are good foods for snacks and they are great for curbing cravings. Keep in mind that fruits and veggies are carbohydrates too!

Where do I get my carbohydrates from?

There are a lot of different foods that you can get carbohydrates from.

Foods such as:

- Squash
- Corn
- Sweet potatoes
- Other potatoes
- Brown rice
- Whole grain breads
- Whole meal bagels
- Certain cereals
- Whole meal pasta
- Legumes
- Fruits and vegetables

- Pumpkin
- Lentils
- Split pea soup
- Oats
- Barley
- 70% cocoa chocolate
- Millet
- Quinoa
- Carob

Recommended Guidelines

To meet the body's daily nutritional needs while minimizing risk for chronic disease, adults should get **45% to 65% of their calories from carbohydrates**. You should try to include a serving of carbohydrate in all of your meals.

Protein

The importance of protein as part of your diet can't be stressed enough.

Protein:

- produces enzymes, hormones, and other substances the body uses
- regulates body processes such as water balancing, transporting nutrients, and making muscles contract
- prevents you from becoming easily fatigued
- helps you to restore lost muscle mass and aids in tissue repair all of which is essential for anyone recovering from an eating disorder.
- makes you feel more satisfied and will be less likely to overeat or binge later on.

Protein makes you **feel fuller for longer by balancing your blood sugar**; it modulates your appetite and greatly reduces binge cravings. (Rolls, Hetherington and Burley's 1988).

A few tips for getting more protein:

- Eat more legumes (beans) as they have about 7 g of protein per serving whereas other whole grains like brown rice and whole wheat bread have 4-5 g protein per serving.
- Eat eggs (including the yolk). Many people stick to eating only egg whites but the egg yolk contains carotenoids, lutein, and vitamin E which can all provide excellent health benefits and disease protection. Egg yolks also contain every vitamin under the sun except vitamin C
- Understand that protein doesn't just come from meat. Vegetables, legumes, tofu products, seafood and whole grains like brown rice, whole grain pastas and breads are great sources of protein.
- Nuts and nut butters are a great source of both protein and fat, including them part of your snacks can really help you to curb those binge urges!

To start with it's a great idea to include a serving of protein in each meal.

Recovery quote

"Protein sources that have been great for me: protein powder in fruit smoothies, hard boiled eggs, cottage cheese, high quality yogurt with lots of probiotics. Homemade jello has protein and can be kind of desserty, too. I use natural gelatin and cook it with organic juice or lemonade. Tofu squares are good. They're firm so they can travel with you and they come in a variety of flavors. Premade protein shakes are kind of icky tasting but have been really great for me on days where I feel in

danger of either skipping meals or bingeing.”

Calcium

Calcium plays an important role in keeping bones and teeth strong and healthy. Our bodies need calcium to help muscles and blood vessels contract and expand, to secrete hormones and enzymes and to send messages through the nervous system.

Most bulimics are woefully low in calcium, so you also want to try to increase your calcium consumption throughout the day. A great way to increase your intake of calcium is to eat vegetables like cabbage, spinach, kale and broccoli since they have many other health benefits in addition to calcium.

Other sources include

Plant-based calcium-rich foods: blackstrap molasses, collard greens, tofu (processed with calcium sulfate), calcium-fortified orange juice, beans, soy or rice milk (calcium-fortified), soy yogurt, turnip greens, tempeh, kale, broccoli, soybeans.

Animal-based calcium-rich foods: cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, milk, sardines.

Potassium

Most of bulimics are deficient in potassium, which is essential for the proper functioning of the heart, kidneys, muscles, nerves, and digestive system. The best sources of potassium: coconut water, bananas, oranges, apricots, avocado, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumber, cabbage, tuna, beef, chicken, sardines, salmon.

Snacks

Snacks keep blood sugar levels up throughout the day, managing hunger and reducing binges. Preferably your snacks should be high in complex carbohydrates.

Some snack ideas include:

- Fruit and ricotta cheese
- Muesli bar
- Piece of fruit
- A chocolate bar
- Dried fruit and nuts
- Mini box of sultanas
- An apple and a biscuit
- Cheese and crackers.

Water

Many bulimics are unaware that they are living in a state of chronic dehydration.

Purging (as well as using diuretics) forces a lot of fluids out of the body. Additionally, bulimics consume a lot of caffeine through coffee, tea and diet sodas. Caffeine is a diuretic and increases water excretion.

Water makes up approximately 60% of our body mass and about 80% of our brain. Even slight dehydration (lack of water) can have a significant impact on our daily lives. The effects of dehydration include poor concentration, headaches, impaired sleep, dry skin, joint problems, sore eyes, digestive disorders and kidney problems. Lack of water is the number-one trigger of daytime fatigue.

Confusing thirst with hunger is one of the major reasons for overeating. In 37 percent of Americans, the thirst mechanism is so weak that it's often mistaken for hunger.

The best way to remain fully hydrated is to drink water regularly during the day, whether you are thirsty or not.

Based on US Water Adequate Intake Recommendations, women should consume 2-2.5 L of water and male – 2.5-3.5L per day

Try increasing your water intake gradually over the next few days and see if you notice any instant benefits in your well-being.

Recovery quote

“I was afraid of drinking water in the beginning of my recovery, and didn't know how much to drink. Proper hydration can cause bloating and rapid weight gain due to water retention in the beginning of recovery, which can continue for weeks and even months. Don't worry it will go away! You must give your body time to restore hormonal, electrolyte and water balance.”

Sample meal plan

Below is a sample meal plans:

Breakfast ideas

- A bowl of porridge with a sprinkle of seed mix (eg sunflower or sesame, and pumpkin).
- Cereal with milk or yogurt and fruit (e.g. banana for potassium).
- Whole meal/multigrain toast (x2) with jam or marmalade, yoghurt, and fruit juice.
- Wholegrain toast (x2) or roll with 2 eggs (poached, scrambled or boiled)
- An egg & a rasher of bacon, plus fruit or juice.
- Turkey rashers fried in a little olive oil with mushrooms and tomatoes,
- Baked beans and toasted whole meal pitta plus 1/2 grapefruit.
- A pancake: 1 egg, a little milk and oatbran mixed together with a fork, fry in a little olive oil.

Lunch ideas:

- Thick soup such as chicken and vegetable or bean and vegetable & a bread roll or some toast.
- Bowl of salad with small tin of tuna & nuts mixed in to it plus a serving of potato, pasta or couscous/ tabbouleh salad (to provide carbohydrate & protein).
- Sandwich on wholegrain bread or roll with a slice of meat (or an egg), cheese & salad (tomato, lettuce, cucumber, carrot with Flaxseed (linseed) oil is an excellent salad dressing)
- 1-2 apples diced, topped with cottage cheese and sprinkled with chopped brazil nuts. With large mixed green leaf salad decorated with curls of smoked salmon and salad dressing

Dinner ideas:

- Pasta with a tomato based sauce (include tuna or bacon etc.) served with green vegetables (e.g. broccoli, beans, asparagus) or salad.
- Fish/beef/pork/lamb/chicken with salad or vegetables & potato/sweet potato/pumpkin.
- Stir fried meat/tofu & vegetables with rice or noodles.
- Salmon steak baked in tinfoil parcel with green beans, almond slivers, garlic/onion to taste. Served on bed of quinoa cooked in bouillon(stock).

Now create your own plan

Spend some time creating your own food plan.

Stick to only your safe foods to start with. Try not to cause yourself too much anxiety. Make a list of all your safe foods and put those in the food plan.

If you're stuck for ideas you could buy a good quality cookbook for inspiration. As you become more confident you **can include a wider variety of foods**.

Create a menu for 3 days

Rather than create a menu for each day, it's much easier to create 3 menus to cover 3 days worth of breakfast, lunch and dinners. Then you can easily pick and choose what you feel like eating from those menus closer to the time.

Be realistic when creating your meal plan. Can you see yourself following this plan?

What would be difficult about putting this plan into action?

If you need help, get in touch with a dietitian.

Foods that will help you feel fuller for longer.

Foods that help you feel fuller do wonders to reduce the binge urge. If you find yourself hungry between meals try adding a few of these foods:

- Bananas: Bananas are a great snack and a great way to nourish your body.
- Eggs: Eggs are an excellent source of protein will keep you full longer.
- Almonds: Almonds are rich in monounsaturated fatty acids and protein. Just one handful of almonds will help keep you full.
- Avocados: Avocados contain good fats (monounsaturated fatty acids) and protein that will fill you up nicely. Not only can you add avocados to salads, but they are great as a spread on sandwiches and you can even add them to a smoothie.
- Peanut butter: Peanut butter is full of protein and a great source of mono-unsaturated fats. You can easily find peanut butter that contains only 100% roasted peanuts (you can buy the organic and non-organic kinds). In other words there are no hydrogenated oils, sugar or salt added to the peanut butter.
- Oatmeal: Oatmeal is under-appreciated in my opinion. Oatmeal is a great super food because it's low in sugar, high in fiber and it's so quick to prepare. It's only takes 5-10 minutes to prepare your oatmeal and you'll be full for hours after eating a bowl.

Combining foods to help stabilize blood sugar

Some people find that they experience an increase in binge urges after eating simple carbohydrates. This happens because these foods are quickly converted into blood sugar – prompting your body to release insulin – causing a temporary dip in blood sugar – which sends the false signal that you need to eat more food.

But you don't need to fear simple carbohydrates and you won't need to avoid them.

Simply combining them with foods that contain a source of fat and/or protein will do the trick. This way the food will take longer to digest which will help your blood sugar level to remain more stable.

If you feel hungry soon after eating you may want to introduce some of these foods into your eating plan.

As an example a typical snack might be banana AND a small container of plain greek yogurt typically mixed with Chia seed for some fiber. Other examples include almonds with an apple, seeds with porridge, peanut butter with ryvita.

Some recommended supplements for your meal plan

Due to malnutrition, people with bulimia are much more likely to suffer from vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This can lead to all sorts of problems including anxiety issues, cognitive impairment, depression and can even increase obsessive and compulsive thoughts and lower self-esteem.

A daily multivitamin

Many people feel the benefits by taking a daily multivitamin, containing the antioxidant vitamins A, C, E, the B-vitamins, and trace minerals, such as magnesium, calcium, zinc, phosphorus, copper and selenium.

Make sure the multi-vitamin has a balanced B complex. This has been shown to be good with helping the body cope with stress.

Zinc

One five-year study, reported by Dr. Schauss, showed an astounding 85 percent recovery rate for anorexia in patients given zinc supplementation. It concluded: "The zinc supplementation resulted in weight gain, better body function and improved outlook."

Omega-3 oils

Omega-3 is not only good for helping ease anxiety and stress; it also has many other reported health benefits, such as lowering blood pressure and possibly reducing the risk of coronary heart disease

Please note we recommend you consult your doctor before taking any supplements.

“How strict should I follow the meal plan?”

What works best for you matters most. Some prefer to use the meal planner as a strict guideline;

the certainty of knowing exactly what to eat helps relieve some of the anxiety. Others prefer to use it as a general guidance or as a backup plan. They may change their mind closer to the time depending on their mood.

“What if I am always hungry between meals?”

If you consistently experience hunger between meals and snacks you may want to reconsider how you schedule your eating – remember everybody is different. Maybe 3 hours is just too long for your body to go without food. Maybe you need to increase the amount of protein and fat in your meals to improve satiety. Try eating oats for breakfast they help to stabilize your blood sugar and digest slowly making you feel fuller for longer.

“What about fruit and vegetables?”

Fruit and vegetables in general are healthy, low fat foods. As a result, these tend to be popular safe foods for bulimics.

Fruits and vegetables are wonderful foods but they do not provide us with all of the nutrients we need to be healthy. Be careful not to eat too many fruits and vegetables at the expense of other food groups. We need to ensure we balance our intake of fruit and veg with our other food groups.

“What if I don’t have any foods that I consider safe?”

Make a list of foods starting with the most tolerable foods. Then eat only small portions of your most tolerable foods to get you started.

Take your time introducing new foods into your diet

Please take your time. If you have been avoiding fat, take your time reintroducing it into your diet. Start slowly with small portions and build it up. It may take a while for your digestive system to relearn how to process food.

In Summary

- You need to eat a good balance of foods to ensure that your body is no longer deprived and a great way to do this is to ensure you're eating at least one serving of complex carbohydrate, protein and fat in each meal.
- Fats are nothing to fear, in fact they are essential for your recovery and your life. After eating food containing fat you'll experience less binge urges, feel fuller for longer and you'll absorb all of the other wonderful nutrients you need from other foods too.
- When it comes to complex carbohydrates you'll need a regular intake of them to recover. They help to keep your brain healthy, reduce binge urges and they're great for snacks too!
- Protein is just as essential as it helps you feel fuller for longer by balancing your blood sugar; it modulates your appetite and greatly reduces binge cravings.
- While aiming for a healthy balance of foods ensure that you're drinking enough water too, it will actually help with any water retention and will reduce false hunger signals.
- Create your own meal plan by looking at the samples provided and please seek the help of a dietitian if you think you'll need it.

Step 5: Increase your portion size.

Many bulimics hesitate to add more than a minuscule amount of food to their meals because of their fear of gaining weight.

But the fact remains:

Under eating will always lead to overeating

It is impossible to stop being bulimic if you don't eat enough food. Binges can occur from even gradual, minor under eating over a period of a few days.

Recovery quote

“Whenever I restrict...even during the times that I convince myself that I'm not, I always end up bingeing a couple days later, always.”

How many calories do you need to eat?

Although we do not like to discuss calories, the chart below from ‘MyPyramid.gov’ helps you determine your optimum daily calories. If you restrict a lot, you may be surprised at the amount of calories your body needs.

	Sedentary: Under 30 daily mins of physical activity.	Mod. Active 30 - 60 daily mins of physical activity.	Active 60+ daily mins of physical activity.
Females			
19-30	2,000	2,200	2,400
31-50	1,800	2,000	2,200
51+	1,600	1,800	2,200
Males			
19-30	2,400	2,800	3,000
31-50	2,200	2,600	3,000
51+	2,000	2,400	2,800

Approx. daily calories

Many bulimics are shocked by these figures.

Remember, these are the US GOVERNMENT APPROVED GUIDELINES for calorie intake for OPTIMAL HEALTHY LIVING.

I do not recommend you follow any caloric guidelines, but if you have just learned that your body needs about 2200 calories per day and perhaps you are eating around 1000, then you know that you will need to add a significant amount of food to your daily intake in order to curb any binge urges.

“How fast should I increase my portion size?”

While it is important to give your body and mind time to adjust to eating larger portion sizes, there are actually lots of benefits to **increasing your portion sizes as quickly as you can.**

When you're still restricting food recovery will continue to feel impossible. Binge urges will remain powerful and you'll be unable to experience the true benefits of structured eating.

I know this is scary, but the truth is you're going to feel uncomfortable eating at first no matter how much food you eat.

The sooner you can start eating enough food, the sooner you'll adapt to recovery.

One useful technique to help you increase portion sizes is to gradually increase your calorie intake over a couple of weeks. Increase the amount of calories you consume by 200-300 each week (or more if you can) until you get to a stage where you're eating enough food.

You need to fully TRUST your BODY to be able to handle the extra food. Your weight isn't going to balloon out of control.

Getting the balance right

It can be challenging to get the balance right between eating enough so you don't get too hungry and eating too much so you risk feeling the need to purge. If you think finishing the plate may cause you too much anxiety, simply stop and walk away from the table when you feel like doing so.

Not eating enough may actually cause unnecessary weight gain!

Did you know that not eating enough can cause you to gain weight rather than lose weight? Not eating enough lowers your metabolic rate which teaches your body to store more of the food you eat as fat.

The great news is that once you start eating normally again (at first by using structured eating) your body will realize that it is no longer being starved. Your metabolic rate will increase and your body will start to convert a lot of the food you eat into energy rather than storing it as fat.

“Should I measure my food portions?”

If you wish to measure portions, you can. If you feel that you need to count calories to avoid a binge, you can do that too. Perhaps you prefer a partner/ friend to set the portion sizes?

Another option is to purchase individual portions from the supermarket (be careful they are the correct size; a lot of the serving sizes in these products are much too small).

Also, you can go to a restaurant that serves normal food portions if you don't feel like measuring portions.

Ultimately you don't have to measure anything because dieting, strict portions sizes and counting calories never works in the long run.

It's OK for now because you are just starting out but over time you should start to practice setting your own portion sizes

“Have I ruined my metabolism?”

Many people with long term bulimia believe that they have ruined their metabolism forever - THIS IS NOT TRUE.

When you stop restricting and denying your body of the fuel that it needs your metabolism will get back to normal.

“What will happen when I do this?”

Here you are tackling food restriction head on. You are really starting to address the CORE of the problem. The good news is that you can expect BIG positive changes and you will really start to feel like you are breaking free from the clutches of bulimia.

With this step you will notice a DRAMATIC reduction in your binge urges, food obsession and anxious thoughts. You will also notice a big increase in your energy levels, general well-being and self-esteem.

Dealing with Hunger Between Meals

“I have given myself the proper amount of food, yet I’m still hungry, should I eat in-between meal times?”

With structured eating it’s best to stick to set meal times which means eating every three hours whether you feel hungry or not. This also means avoiding eating/snacking in-between meals.

“Why is it best to avoid snacking in-between meals and snacks?”

Eating all of the time or continually snacking throughout the day, even if you’re not technically bingeing, can just be another way of keeping your bulimia alive. It doesn’t help you to learn normal eating patterns and you’re probably going to be eating for a mixture of hunger and emotion which is not so great. So it’s better to teach yourself how to eat regularly, but not constantly, in order to normalize your eating patterns.

Recovery quote

“In the later stages of my bulimia my binges changed. I wasn’t having lots of big, “all you can eat in the shortest amount of time” binges anymore, instead I was continually eating all day long, stopping to purge regularly. I suppose you could call it binge-grazing. In recovery I found that I was desperate to eat in-between meals at first, but when I really looked at things I knew the hunger wasn’t real. It was just another type of bulimic urge. So I trusted in the rigidity of structured eating and eventually learned that I could eat normally without panicking.”

“But I thought recovery was about listening to my hunger not ignoring it?”

You’re right and in time you will learn how to trust your intuitive hunger signals. But right now you can’t trust your natural hunger and satiety signals because constant bingeing and purging desensitises you to them. Structured eating offers the best solution for the time being.

“But eating like this feels like a diet!”

It can feel like that, but remember structured eating is not something you’re aiming to do forever.

Structured eating is the gateway. It will ensure that you're not going too long without food for now and in time you will be able to trust your body to tell you when it is hungry, you will move on from structured eating to become an intuitive eater.

“So what should I do if I feel hungry in-between meals and snacks?”

Many people feel hungry between meals and snacks at first, the trouble is it can be difficult to identify whether this is real hunger, or false hunger.

Could it be false hunger?

Think about how your hunger feels. Is it a continual urge to eat that is causing you anxiety or panic? Are you having thoughts about eating because you simply can't stop thinking about food and know eating will provide momentary relief? Do you feel hunger above the neck? If yes then there is a good chance the hunger you are feeling is not real. Practice accepting these thoughts and feelings and remind yourself calmly that soon it will be time to eat again.

Could it be real hunger?

Is there a rumbling in your stomach? Do you feel faint, weak or lightheaded? Do you think that this is real hunger? Eating every 3 hours is something that does really work for recovery, so rather than starting to snack in-between meals and disrupting this cycle, the best advice is to eat a little more for your meals and snacks. Try upping your portion sizes/increasing your calories throughout the day slightly and see if this helps.

“But I'm already eating enough calories!”

Are you sure?

Think about this very carefully for a second.

Do you live a very active lifestyle?

Do you work long hours or rush around a lot?

Do you exercise regularly?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions then there is a good chance that your body needs more fuel. When referring to the calorie guidelines make sure you consider all physical activity (not just driven exercise or work-out times).

“I'm definitely eating enough but I still feel hungry between meals and snacks!”

If you're sure you're getting enough calories and that you're eating regularly then it helps to consider the types of foods you're eating. Have you been following the basic guidelines of including at least one portion of carbohydrate, fat and protein in each meal? Fat and protein helps to slow down digestion which stabilizes blood sugar levels and keeps you fuller for longer.

“I'm following all of this advice but STILL feel hunger between meals and snacks!”

If you are continuing to feeling hunger at this stage and believe the hunger is real then it does make sense to slightly reduce the time between meals and snacks. Try eating every 2 ½ hours and see if it makes a difference.

“Why do I still want to binge when I’m using structured eating?”

Even when eating the proper amount of food for your body it still takes time for the binge urge to disappear (sometimes a few months). In some ways the binge urge is testing you, by making sure you are truly going to give your body the proper nutrition it needs before it trusts you enough to really let go.

Stick with the structured eating plan, in time you **WILL NOTICE A BIG REDUCTION** in your binge urge, but you must give it time.

Recovery quote

“I wish I could give you all a look inside my head so you could see how wonderful life without bulimia is. You are so much more than this, all of you! But you will never, ever, recover while you are still restricting. You have to put trust in something your disorder does not want you to believe, it is the only way out but god is it worth it.”

In summary

- Under-eating will always eventually lead to overeating.
- Slowly and gradually increase the size of your portions. Try not to add too much. You don’t want to feel uncomfortably full and risk purging.
- If you feel like bingeing soon after a planned meal, it might be a sign that you need to increase the size of your portions.
- Try to fully **TRUST** your **BODY**; it is able to handle extra food. Also understand that your weight isn’t going to balloon out of control.

Step 6: Eat slowly and pay attention

I want to introduce **TWO** powerful, simple strategies to vastly improve your relationship with food.

These are:

1. Eat slowly

2. Pay attention when eating.

Start to eat slowly

Bulimics tend to eat very fast. When they do allow themselves to eat, they tend to stuff it down as quickly as they can so they don’t have to deal with the anxiety of eating.

By eating food in a chaotic, tense, anxious way we associate eating food with chaos, tension and anxiety. Instead we want to associate eating food with calm, peace and nurturing.

To do this we are going to eat much more slowly.

A simple strategy to eat slowly is to put your knife and fork down between bites.

Also, try chewing your food twice as much as usual. Chewing is the first stage in the digestion of your food; it also moves the food over your taste buds giving you the full experience of tastes and textures.

If it helps, pretend you are eating an expensive gourmet meal and you wish to savor every bite.

If you find it difficult to eat slowly at the start of a meal, then eat at your normal pace but reduce your speed as you are becoming fuller.

What will happen when I do this?

It takes about 20–30 minutes for your body to register that you've eaten enough, so by eating fast it's very easy to overeat. By slowing down it becomes much more difficult to eat large amounts of high fat and high sugar foods.

It's hard to enjoy your food if it goes by too quickly. When you begin to practice to eat more slowly you'll find that you start to enjoy the taste and experience of eating more.

If you eat slower, you'll chew your food better, which leads to better digestion. Digestion actually starts in the mouth, so the more work you do up there; the less you'll have to do in your stomach. This can help lead to fewer digestive problems.

Lead researcher Kathleen Melanson had 30 normal-weight college-age women consume a large bowl of pasta. They were asked to eat the food quickly. On a second occasion they were asked to eat the same meal - but to really take their time.

The Results

Eating quickly - consumed 646 calories in 9 minutes. Eating slowly - consumed 579 calories in 29 minutes.

Upon completion of the meal and an hour afterward, the women were less satisfied and hungrier when eating quickly compared with when they ate slowly, she says. They said they enjoyed the meal more when they were taking their time. (via USA Today).

Tips for eating slower

Use the fork down method. Every time you take a bite, put your fork down immediately. The more we hold our fork in our hands, the more we are tempted to keep shoveling it in.

Chew your food as much as you can. Chew thoroughly and pay attention to texture, taste and substance. The more you chew your food, the more you will feel full and be able to swallow properly.

Stop after each bite and make conversation. Talking through a meal, but not while chewing, can make you halt and slow down your eating habits.

Put yourself in a calm mood before you eat.

Recovery quote

"In the beginning I found it helpful to counting how many times I am chewing: 20-30 times was usually enough"

Pay Attention

Most bulimics eat unconsciously. They would rather shut off their mind rather than face the reality of the food they are eating. But if you're not paying attention you will miss the comfortably full sensation and go straight to feeling stuffed.

A study made by The Duke and Indiana State University revealed how binge eaters who participated in a nine-week program into mindful eating went from binge eating four times a week to once a week.

The key aspect to the approach was 'generating awareness'; as well as adopting a non-judgmental approach when it came to eating, meaning 'banishing our diet mentality' and 'guilt' before, during and after eating.

Create your Eating Den

In the future, when you eat I want you to pay attention to your food. Turn off the T.V, put the book down, and stop having conversations, instead just focus on the food.

Try eating all your meals in one place. Make it pleasurable and relaxing. Sit down when eating; perhaps try lighting a candle or playing relaxing music. By eating in only one place you are making a clear statement to your mind that this is where you eat food. This makes it easier to leave the food behind when you are finished.

Put your food on a plate. By using a plate you are making it official "I am having food now", instead of just grazing through snacks from the cupboard.

By creating a peaceful environment, you are sending a clear signal to yourself that the food battle is over.

Sit down, remove all distractions and make it pleasant.

What will happen when you do this?

For a start - and perhaps for the first time ever - you will really begin to notice food. How it affects your body, what it really tastes like. Overtime you will begin to understand and learn what foods your body really likes and how much food it takes to feel full.

This is the great golden secret to enjoyable, lifelong healthy weight management. Eating SLOWLY with full CONSCIOUSNESS on your eating will TRANSFORM how and what you eat.

In Summary

- Make a conscious effort to begin to eat more slowly, utilising different strategies like putting down your knife and fork between bites, if you find this difficult.
- Pay attention and eat with awareness.
- Tune into the physical sensations of eating food.
- If possible eat your meals in a calm relaxing environment away from distractions.

Step 7: Embrace your body's natural set point weight.

It amazes me set point theory isn't more common knowledge. It really helps to explain why our body resists weight change and why is it so difficult for us to become stick thin.

So what is set point theory?

Your height is your height. It's the way you were born and there isn't much you can do about it, so you accept it. Well, the same principal applies to weight.

Our weight has a natural genetic set point which is thought to range between 5-10 lbs. This is the weight we were born to be. Some of us have a heavy set point; some of us have a lighter set point, but most of us are somewhere in between.

Set point is different for every person – and can be different for people of the same height. A very thin woman may appear really thin but this is just her set point – the same goes for a larger woman.

Our body strongly defends our set point, so going below or above this range can kick start your body into a battle. Your body will resist the new weight and fight to get back to its comfort zone (Keesey 1993).

Studies show that when a child is adopted into a family who already have biological children, they are not likely to take on the same physical characteristics as their adoptive parents in the same ways as those biological children do.

If the parents are significantly overweight, it is likely that the biological children will also become overweight. But the adopted child does not seem to be affected by this environment.

Set points also tend to increase with age which is why it is unrealistic and probably unhealthy to aim to maintain your teenage weight in your 30s and 40s.

A diet very high in fat and sugar and dieting in general seem to promote a higher set point.

Regular exercise can result in a lower set-point.

So, the big question is: What is my set point?

If you have been struggling with bulimia, food restriction and weight for many years then it can be difficult to determine your set point. Observing your weight patterns over time gives an indication of what your natural weight may be. If your weight has gone up and down dramatically then your set point is probably somewhere in the middle – this may be the starting weight before you began to restrict food.

What kind of body type does your mother have? What about your father? Other family members? If your parents are heavy then the chances are that you will never be model thin – genetics is a strong determinant of body size.

If your weight has increased as a result of dieting and bulimia, you may lose weight when you begin to eat normally, although this weight loss tends to be quite gradual. If you have been drastically restricting, you may gain a few pounds to return to your set point weight.

At your set point there is no struggle to maintain weight, it's natural, comfortable and feels just right.

Studies show that even though we may be losing weight, we feel fatter.

Most of us just want to be happy.

Most of us attempt to lose weight in the false belief that it will make us happier.

But studies show the more we restrict, the more we suffer body image problems.

Studies show that even though we may be losing weight, we feel fatter.

Because our brain is lacking in serotonin, it doesn't matter how thin we become - we will never be truly satisfied with our weight.

I'll repeat that point again.

Because our brain is lacking in serotonin, it doesn't matter how thin we become - we will never be truly satisfied with our weight!

It's a battle that you CAN NEVER WIN. If you are under your set-point weight you will never **be truly happy with your weight. EVER.**

It is an impossible goal.

All your efforts to make yourself MORE CONTENT with your body are only making you MORE MISERABLE about your body.

And don't kid yourself for a second thinking you are going to be any different, that these rules are not going to apply to you. If you are reading this book it's obvious that the rules DO apply to you.

To be truly free from bulimia we must accept and embrace our natural set point weight

Consider this; only about 5-10% of American women have the ultra-long and thin body-type that is seen almost exclusively in the media. It also helps to remember that the majority of the images you see in the media have been heavily edited, digitally touched up, stretched and airbrushed. It is an illusion, this is not reality.

Women who attempt to achieve this body type (but lack the genetic material to do so) are setting themselves up for a lifetime of yo-yo dieting, weight fluctuations, disordered eating, and depression.

As Dr Phil would say "It's time to get REAL."

Attempting to be a weight that is lower than your set point will always lead to MISERY and PAIN. It will ALWAYS lead you back to your EATING DISORDER.

THE ONLY WAY FOR LIFE LONG HAPPINESS WITH FOOD IS TO LIVE AT YOUR IDEAL NATURAL, HEALTHY WEIGHT.

YOU WILL FEEL STRONGER, FITTER AND BETTER THAN YOU EVER FELT WHILE YOU WERE BULIMIC.

"But, what if I don't want to live at my set point weight?"

It's okay to feel unsure about all of this right now. At first we all worry that we'll never be able to fully accept our normal, healthy set point weight.

Imagining a life where you'll never diet again, where you no longer let the numbers on a scale judge your worth and where you've abandoned the pursuit of that "skinny ideal" can feel devastating too.

For a time it might even feel like you've given up on everything you ever believed in, but let me assure you, accepting your natural set point is not giving up. It is not failure or defeat. It is the biggest act of bravery and it will lead you to a lifetime of happiness.

The catch? You have to be willing to give it time.

Give it 6 months of your life and see how you feel. 6 months is a realistic time frame for change to happen and recovering bulimics to get past the difficult early months of recovery.

Give it 6 months to decide whether this is a better way to live the rest of your life. Trust me, you'll

be surprised by how quickly you adapt.

Forget about having a goal weight during recovery.

It is very common for bulimics to plan to lose a certain amount of weight before starting recovery. This is a bad idea. Any goal weights will encourage food restriction and will keep your bulimia alive.

Recovery quote

"I thought I would lose weight till I was like 5 kg under my healthy weight, then try and recover, but it was impossible for me to lose those 5 kg, and it actually fueled my bulimia more. So I can tell you from experience, it won't work!"

Fluctuations in weight during recovery.

Scary as it sounds your weight will fluctuate a little during recovery.

Periods of weight gain and weight loss will be unique to each individual in recovery, but take comfort in the fact that research shows **most people with bulimia in the healthy weight range who adopt regular eating end up within 1kg of where they started, and some even lose weight.**

Ultimately, if you're underweight you have to accept that you will gain a little "needed weight", alternatively if you're overweight you can expect your weight to slowly decrease following those initial fluctuations.

Remember after months of re-feeding, the Ancel Keys volunteers did not skyrocket into obesity. On average, they gained back their original weight plus about 10%; then, over the next 6 months, their weight gradually declined. By the end of the follow-up period, they were approaching their pre-experiment weight levels.

"Will I gain unnecessary weight?"

If you experience residual binges once you stop purging (which almost everyone does for a time), or continue to restrict your food and remain in a state of distressed hunger then there is a chance that you could gain more weight than your body needs, **however this is a normal part of recovery**, and over time as you binge less and become more confident with increasing your portion sizes your body will return to its natural, healthy set point weight.

"How does eating more food help to stop unneeded weight gain?"

By eating enough calories each day (usually at least 2000 for a woman and 2500 for a man) we are able to normalize our metabolisms so our body converts the food we eat into energy, rather than storing it as fat.

"How long will it take for my weight to balance out?"

Research and Bulimia Help member experiences show us that during the process of normalizing your eating behaviors almost everyone experiences some kind of weight change and it can take around 6 months for your weight to stabilize at its set point weight.

Be mentally prepared for any temporary changes in your weight.

If your weight increases, do not panic - this is just a part of recovery. In time it will probably decrease again.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that you do not let any temporary fluctuations throw you off recovery.

Recovery quote

“I did experience some tiny weight fluctuations over the first few months, but they were nothing compared to the weight fluctuations I used to experience as a result of bingeing and purging anyway. The biggest weight increase I experienced actually happened when I was having a difficult time a few months into recovery - and listen to this - It happened because I started skipping meals again. Your bulimic mind will tell you that gaining weight by not eating enough food is nonsense but it is complete scientific fact. That's another reason why it is so important to make sure you're eating enough food in recovery.”

Will my weight spiral out of control?

This can be the biggest fear for people in recovery. But remember by following a sensible eating plan you are more than likely consuming less calories than you would if you starved and then binged and purged.

If you do experience a large change in the number on the scale then chances are this is a **result of re-hydration and bloating**.

Even if you are consuming more calories keep in mind a sensible eating plan will give your metabolism a massive boost that will more than compensate for the extra calories.

Recovery, freedom and a healthy weight for life are achievable. You just need to trust your body and give it time to become comfortable with normal eating again.

Ditch the scales

Scales are one of the biggest binge triggers. It's been proven that both good and bad scale numbers can lead to bingeing. If we get on the scale and it says that we have lost a great deal of weight, we can use that as a justification to overindulge. If the scale says we have not done as well as we have hoped, we can use that as the reason to quit, and give up.

It's time to stop obsessing over the number on the scale...

You will not need a scale to measure your progress. Your improved wellbeing, confidence and energy levels will let you know you are on the path to recovery.

Scales are not accurate. Weight can fluctuate and vary depending on hormone changes, gains in lean muscle mass, water retention and even whether or not you've used the restroom recently.

It's time to get rid of the scales. You don't need them and they won't help. This includes any other weight measurement tools you may have, such as your “skinny clothes” or measuring tapes.

By looking after ourselves and our bodies in the best way we can, our weight/size will be the healthiest level that is possible for our own body type.

Recovery quote

“I didn't think I could ever get rid of my scale! I used to weigh myself before and after each binge/purge, every morning and night. When I first stopped throwing everything up, I still weighed

myself every day and after a few days, I actually lost weight. Then I got so obsessed with keeping that weight off, I panicked at gaining even as little as 200g. That's like a glass of water. Wow, it sounds really stupid now, getting upset over that but stepping on the scales only made me start binge/purge again

I didn't think I could stop stepping on the scale, but after a day or two, I finally did it! I took out the batteries and hid them in the back of my closet. (I was too cheap to throw out a perfectly working scale).

Now I can eat a "normal" meal, and since I don't have to weigh myself, it feels like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. If any of you are reading this and feeling hesitant toward throwing out your scales, I say do it!! It's the biggest thing that I've done physically to help me start my recovery!!!"

"But what if I don't feel strong enough to ditch my scales straight away?"

We understand that for many people the thought of ditching the scales can be tough.

Here are some great ideas that you can try out until you are ready to ditch the scales for good:

- Try hiding your scales rather than throwing them out.
- If you do feel that you must check in with a scale, try NOT to weigh in any more than once every two weeks. Over time as your confidence builds increase the period of time between checking in.
- If your doctor needs to record your weight explain that the numbers can be triggering and ask to step on the scales backwards. This may seem a little strange to you, but any doctor will totally understand your request. Remember it is vital that you put recovery first.
- Eventually, when you feel strong enough to live without the scales why not take a big hammer to them, smash them up, and rejoice in your new found freedom!

In summary

- Your weight has a natural genetic set point - this is the weight you were born to be.
- Once you overcome your fears, being at this weight will feel natural, comfortable and just right.
- When you attempt to lose weight your body strongly defends your natural set point. Worse still, studies show the more you restrict, the more you will suffer body image problems. So even if you do start to lose weight if you are below your set point, you will actually feel fatter!
- Due to serotonin depletion, it doesn't matter how much weight you lose, you'll never be truly satisfied with your weight. You may have often thought that if you lost a specific amount of weight you'd be happy, but that couldn't be further from the truth.
- By not accepting your natural set point weight you are setting yourself up for a lifetime of disordered eating, unhappiness, depression and disappointment.
- Goal weights don't work for recovery. It is vital that you do not set yourself a goal weight as doing so will keep your bulimia alive.
- As scary as it sounds, you will experience weight fluctuations for the first few months of your recovery. You need to be mentally prepared for this and understand that these changes are temporary.
- Ditching the scales can work wonders too because you will not need to look to the number on a scale to see your progress.

Step 8: Don't FEAR the bloat.

Recovery from bulimia is a process of healing and healing means change. During this time your body will adjust and adapt as it calibrates to your new healthier lifestyle.

Although frustrating and scary at times, in the process of healing, your body needs time to adjust, adapt and heal. You need to trust that these changes are a normal part of recovery.

Expect to have some bloating.

It's funny to think that the number one reason people fail to recover from bulimia is bloating. But I guess it shouldn't be taken lightly. For many bloating can be terrifying. Their body is undergoing strange weird changes that they haven't experienced in years. Its uncomfortable, a little alien and a lot scary.

And I guess, if you wanted to get rid of the bloat then restricting your food intake again would be the fastest way. But that path leads us straight back to bulimia and that's not where we want to go.

So, let's gets this clear now.

Chances are you will experience bloating.

And it's absolutely 100% perfectly natural, normal and to be expected.

I am going to repeat that again

Bloating is absolutely 100% perfectly natural, normal and to be expected.

Reasons for bloating include:

- You are eating more food
- You are retaining a little water.
- Due to your decreased metabolism, food moves more sluggishly through your system. In time your metabolism will speed up.
- Without adequate protein, you can't produce the digestive enzymes needed to break down food.

The important thing to note is that:

A BLOATED STOMACH IS NOT A FATTER STOMACH;

IT'S A HEALING STOMACH.

Tell yourself this over and over:

Food in your stomach is NOT fat

Feeling bloated will NOT turn to FAT

It will pass. Be patient with your body.

Your stomach is learning how to work again after a lot of punishment; you must forgive it for being a little rusty to start with. The good news is that bloating usually resolves itself within 4-6 weeks of eating patterns becoming normalized.

And just remember:

The bloating will pass.

It does take time, it can take up to 6 weeks but it does pass.

Once it does pass, feel proud of yourself that you have overcome another big obstacle to recovery.

Some great tips to help with bloating

- Sip water throughout each day
- Try 6 small meals instead of 3 meals and 3 snacks
- Gradually increase food portion sizes
- Try to eat more fiber
- Try eating foods with FAT present. You need to eat fewer of them to feel satisfied
- Wear looser clothing so that you are not so conscious of the food in your stomach.
- Try drinking water with lemon
- Herbal teas such as peppermint tea, dandelion tea, ginger tea

Recovery quote

"I find, light exercise, just to the point of breaking a sweat, can help circulation and thus reduce bloating."

If you are worried or in pain

If you believe there is something seriously wrong, if you are worried or if you are in pain then always get checked out by your doctor. Chances are there is nothing wrong, but it is always good to have peace of mind.

Letting go of the FEAR of bloating

The truth is bloating isn't that bad. Yes it's uncomfortable and annoying but these problems are magnified tenfold because of the FEAR it induces. Let's be honest, if you're not ready for it, bloating can be quite scary.

Just about everyone can deal with a little discomfort but most people find it difficult to deal with any fear. Fear is an extremely powerful force and this is why bloating causes so many to quit recovery.

You may have fear that it isn't bloating but fat or fear that what your experiencing is not normal. You may start convincing yourself that something is seriously wrong with you, that your bloating has to be far worse than everyone else's, that you have developed a food intolerance or that your body will never be able to adjust to digesting food again.

These fearful thoughts are **perfectly normal and to be expected.**

Understand that almost everyone experiences this kind of paranoia in recovery.

Understand it's just fear and nothing more.

It's like the imaginary scary monster hiding under your bed at night. Yes it can be scary but when you actually pluck up the courage to look you discover that there was nothing there.

Expose the fear thoughts for what they really are. Just irrational thoughts. Ignore them and get on with your day.

(You can also use the techniques in "Stage 2 Diffusing the binge urge" to help remove these fear thoughts.)

Another way to look at bloating

If I were to say to you that I will give you a million dollars to wear a pair of trousers that are two sizes too small for you for a month. Would you do it?

Of course you would!

Yes you would feel uncomfortable but I'm guessing it wouldn't bother you in the slightest. You wouldn't care about the discomfort at all.

A million dollars to wear a tight pair of pants for a month...easy!

Well its the exact same with bloating.

Only the prize is BETTER than a million dollars.

You're going to get your life back free from bulimia!

A LIFETIME FREE from bulimia FAR OUTWEIGHS the discomfort of a few weeks bloating.

Because this is so important I am going to get down on my knees and beg you.

“Please! please! please! Don't let bloating stop you from a life FREE from bulimia.”

Are you willing to experience a short period of bloating in order to have lifelong recovery from bulimia?

I'm hoping the answer is a loud and clear YES!

Recovery quote

“I had not eaten and digested a proper meal in probably 5 or so years so my body freaked out a bit when I first started eating meals. That feeling of having food in my belly would just flick me into binge mode as my body was so used to being stuffed with food whenever that feeling came. Sitting through that feeling was so difficult.

The best thing to do for me was to eat lots of small meals each day so it would feel more comfortable. I still would feel bloated by the end of the day but each day gets easier, the more food you allow your body to digest the better it gets at it. After a week I noticed a huge improvement and finally now at almost a month I feel like my digestion is almost back to normal! I am so proud of my body for learning so quickly!”

Facial swelling

Bulimia can cause swelling around your jaw line and at the sides of your face (specifically of the parotid glands). Sometimes known as “puffy face” or “chipmunk cheeks” this is a natural reaction to self-induced vomiting. This is mostly due to water retention.

Purging makes you dehydrated and to compensate your body attempts to hold on to as much water as it can.

The swelling can also be increased when gland tissues become damaged due to the constant attack from stomach acid during episodes of purging.

Individual experiences vary a lot but in general you should see your facial swelling decrease significantly after the first month of recovery. For many this can be a wonderful moment in their recovery journey.

In Summary

- At the start of recovery you will experience some bloating but this is perfectly natural and 100% to be expected, it happens to everyone and it will pass in time.
- Bloating happens because your body isn't used to eating food, because you're retaining a little more water than usual and because your metabolism is a little sluggish - meaning your food digests slower.

- In time you WILL overcome bloating. This usually takes between 4-6 weeks.
- Please be patient, you have to allow your body the time it needs to adapt to recovery.
- Know that it is extremely common to experience paranoia and excessive worry about bloating. It's usually nothing to worry about but if you are overly concerned or in pain then it does make sense to visit your doctor for a check up.
- Always keep the bigger picture in mind. A lifetime free from bulimia far outweighs a couple of weeks worth of bloating.

Step 9: Eat TWO “any foods” every day

"Eat this... don't eat that... only eat that before 7pm..."

You were not born with a list of foods that you should or shouldn't eat. We pick up such rules from magazines, TV, diet plans, diet gurus, parents, friends; anywhere and everywhere really.

We want to eat healthily. We really do. So we try our best to follow these rules.

Overtime as more rules get added to our list, the amount of acceptable foods we allow ourselves shrinks.

Our list of “safe foods” gets smaller and smaller, less satisfying and harder to stick to.

We mourn the loss of foods we don't allow ourselves to eat and they become extra special, tastier and more desirable.

We miss the tasty flavours and joy of eating the banned foods, so we end up feeling miserable and deprived.

Eventually we become fed up, tired and frustrated with our rules and we eat something that isn't our “safe foods” list.

The moment of pleasure is quickly followed by guilt, shame, anxiety and fear. This is only a fast track to a full blown binge.

Having food rules is VERY destructive; it encourages anxiety, deprivation, and fear. This keeps your bulimia alive.

And it isn't just bulimics who experience this.

In a random study involving 2,075 adults, 45% said they felt guilty after eating!

It's a shame that by eating a certain type of food we can ruin our whole day and destroy our fragile self-esteem.

At the beginning our food rules were supposed to make us happier, healthier and more in control, but as time continues they have only made us more miserable and even more out of control.

We always break our diet rules, so why set them up in the first place?

We must get it into our heads that food rules DO NOT HELP US; THEY ONLY MAKE OUR BULIMIA WORSE.

Jean Kristeller, psychologist at Indiana State, who pioneered mindful eating said: *“Diets set up rules around food and disconnect people even further from their own experiences of hunger, satiety and fullness.”*

There is no such thing as ‘bad’ foods!

There is no such thing as ‘junk’ food, ‘rubbish’ food, ‘bad’ food. These are just labels created by

the latest so called expert or diet guru.

It's another big myth!

Chocolate isn't "bad" and apples aren't "good".

A new way to look at foods

Instead, a healthier and more realistic way to view food is: "sometimes food" and "all the time food".

Ideally you should eat some foods more frequently than others.

Some foods like: fruit and vegetables, meat/ fish/ tofu, bread/ rice/ potatoes/ pasta and oils, should be eaten every day, so we call these "all the time foods."

While other 'energy dense' foods, like chocolate, ice-cream and chips should be eaten less often and can be thought of as 'sometimes foods'.

I'm not saying that you should eat 10 bars of chocolate every day, instead of your normal meals (besides, it wouldn't take you very long to become bored with chocolate). However, I am saying it is certainly acceptable to eat a little chocolate when you feel like it. You should not avoid foods because you think they are 'bad' foods.

"But I am scared to get rid of my food rules. Do I have to get rid of them all?"

The reason we fear letting go of our food rules is because we have been BRAINWASHED into believing they are doing us justice. And it takes time for this BRAINWASHING to disappear.

We do not expect you to get rid of your food rules overnight. You may have been following food rules for a long time. Therefore, instantly getting rid of them could easily leave you in a state of fear and panic, not to mention, it could lead you straight back to the comfort of bingeing.

So instead, we are going to take it slowly. Your first step is to introduce "Any foods" into your food plan.

Starting to eat "any foods"

Let's clean up our brainwashed minds and start understanding that food rules DO NOT HELP YOU IN ANY WAY. Let's begin to experience eating the very foods that were previously forbidden.

You are going to try to rebuild your experiences with eating these foods by starting to introduce "any foods" into your food plan.

This means exactly what it says - starting to eat any of the foods that you like. No limits, no restrictions, no rules, just 100% intuitively selecting the foods that you want to eat.

This means eating the foods that you are really craving, in spite of the "food rules" that you used to associate with them.

It's very simple...

Every day, add two "any foods" to your meal plan.

Just like the title suggests these can be any foods that you want.

The basic rules are:

- No foods are forbidden.

- No foods are too fattening or addictive.
- You can eat absolutely whatever you want when you feel like it – with no strings attached.

If you want a piece of chocolate for desert, then allow yourself a bit of chocolate.

Or, if you prefer, you can have your “any food” as a snack.

Whenever you feel ready to do this start adding two “any foods” daily into your meal plan.

“Why must I do this?”

It’s not the food that leads to a binge; it’s the anxiety and fear associated with eating the food. By avoiding specific foods completely you are only reaffirming this anxiety and fear.

By confronting this fear, you will expose it as a fake and then these foods will quickly lose the anxiety and fear attached to them.

Very soon, it will become evident that you can handle all foods and they have no control over you and your recovery.

“Do I have to have "any foods" twice a day?”

Consuming “any foods” twice a day, effectively de-stigmatizes them, making them less desirable.

Don't think of “any foods” as special treats to be eaten occasionally. They are not special treats – do not make them more special than they really are. Sporadic consumption is likely to make them more of a binge trigger when eaten.

Regular consumption of forbidden foods will prevent you bingeing on them. You will no longer feel so deprived and miserable.

You will start to find that your prohibited food loses its sparkle. When these previously off limit foods are tasted every day people report that they do NOT taste as good as previously imagined.

The introduction of “any foods” is a standard protocol in many residential eating disorder treatment centers.

"But what if the foods I want to eat are all really healthy anyway?"

It is great practice for you to tune in and 100% intuitively, select two “any foods” that you want to eat each day without limitation or rules.

If you find yourself intuitively wanting to eat salads, fruit or wholefoods then that is fine. Of course, if you find that this is the case all of the time then you may need to question whether you are really letting yourself be intuitive. If you are then there is no problem, but if you’re still letting those food fears hold you back then it is important to become aware of it.

Most people don't crave very healthy foods 100% of the time and it is important to allow ANY FOODS that you want, even if you previously considered them to be trigger or challenge foods.

When you first start doing this you may find that you intuitively want to eat more of the foods that you previously avoided. This is perfectly normal. Once they lose their "special power" over you, you will find you want to eat them a lot less.

“But... I’ve been avoiding these foods for years, how can you expect me to just start eating them again?”

Although you may have been trying to avoid these foods, it hasn't stopped you from bingeing on them!

Look, let's get this straight...

You are going to eat these foods anyway, no matter if you try to avoid them or not.

Would you rather have loads of candy at once, or lots of small pieces that you can enjoy over time and guilt free?

There is nothing to fear – your body can handle it!

Make this your motto: "Two (any foods) a day can keep bulimia at bay!"

Make a list of your top 10 favorite foods

A lot of the time some of your favorite foods are only eaten as part of a binge. Acknowledge that these foods are important to you and by not eating them you will feel deprived.

Make a list of your top 10 favorite foods and make sure you include them into your meal plan.

Then re-order your list starting with the safest food first.

It can be difficult to decide which of your trigger and challenge foods are the "safest" but usually there will be some foods that you feel would be far less challenging to start re-introducing.

Ordering your list in this way will help you to start working on introducing trigger and challenge foods one at a time. It also means you won't need to start re-introducing the more difficult foods until you have progressed further in recovery.

Take your time here. There is no need to rush.

Whenever you are feeling confident and ready try adding one of your challenging foods to your meal plan.

Recovery quote

"For the first eight weeks of my recovery I avoided all of my trigger foods because I wanted to give myself the best start. It was hard enough learning to eat every 3 hours without having to worry about being triggered on top of that. After those eight weeks I gradually reintroduced most of my trigger foods. I tried to never buy them in large quantities and I tried to only eat them when I felt very safe and not too hungry. I think that really helped."

"Are you sure? but eating "any foods" can lead to a binge!"

Why do you think this happens?

It happens because these foods feel special, you feel as though you are breaking some rules and you feel deprived.

It isn't until you eat them every day that they lose their magic. They become normal and you feel no anxiety eating them.

In time, by doing this you will be able to better understand what your body needs.

Take it easy

Do this only when you're ready and not feeling too vulnerable ("vulnerable" includes over hungry, overstressed, or experiencing some other overwhelming feeling or anguish).

For many people with bulimia this can be scary. Too much fear and anxiety will have you running back to bulimia for comfort.

AGAIN, PLEASE BE EASY ON YOURSELF. THIS CAN BE CHALLENGING. IT WILL TAKE TIME.

REMEMBER, NO ONE EXPECTS YOU TO BE PERFECT. TAKE YOUR TIME AND GO AT YOUR OWN PACE.

Eating "any foods" is an essential part of recovery, but we do recommend you start slowly, take baby steps and go at your own pace.

In Summary

- Acknowledge that food rules do not help you in any way.
- Stop labelling foods as good and bad, instead label foods as "sometimes foods" and "all the time foods"
- Make a list of your top 10 favorite foods and ensure you are not deprived of these foods.
- Every day, add two "any foods" to your meal plan.
- Remember, while this can be challenging at first, eating "any foods" every day will help you to banish harmful and unnecessary food rules.

Step 10: Accept relapses as a normal part of recovery

The most important thing you can do to get the most out of your recovery is to realize that there is no such thing as a "perfect recovery".

You will experience a lot of ups and downs along the way; understanding that relapse is a completely normal and expected part of the process is essential.

It takes time for binge urges to disappear. You may experience strong urges to binge for the next few months. This is very natural and a normal part of recovery, so please do not let them cause you any panic and don't be surprised if you binge. **IT DOES NOT MEAN YOU ARE BACK TO SQUARE ONE.**

Relapses can really knock your confidence

When you relapse it can leave you feeling trapped in a really scary place. You can feel like a failure and often like all of the hard work that you have put into recovery so far has been for nothing. You can find yourself feeling like you're 'back at square one' and often for a time our bulimic behaviours can return with a vengeance.

Relapse can repeatedly make you feel like:

1. Recovery will be impossible,
2. Recovery only happens for other people, or
3. Lifelong recovery never really happens for anyone – (feelings like this can be especially true

if you experience relapses quite far on into the recovery process)

But once you are able to accept that relapses are a natural part of the process you are able to move away from those feelings. In many ways it is your attitude to relapse that can end up having the most profound effect on your recovery experience.

Relapses are valuable

You should never underestimate how positive an episode of relapse can be. A relapse lets us know that something isn't quite working in our recovery plan. It can let us know that we're not eating enough and not getting enough rest

Experiencing relapse can help us to develop new plans and strategies and to be stronger next time we face the same triggering situation. Even more than that a relapse can often let us see how truly wonderful recovery actually is.

Accept relapses as a natural part of recovery

The first thing to remember is that setbacks happen, so never let a setback convince you that you're not making progress. When it happens it does not mean all your progress has been undone. In general, setbacks are inevitable, and you need to have an accepting attitude toward them.

A big reason why people get discouraged is that they have this false illusion of what the path to recovery looks like. If they slip up and relapse, they think they are a failure. But, this isn't the case!

What does real recovery look like?

- Real recovery is a gradual reduction in your binge frequency, intensity and duration over time.
- Real recovery is slowly reducing the number of binges you have each week, it's not promising yourself to never binge again.
- Real recovery is to have some weeks which are tougher than others, but having the wisdom to see the BIGGER picture and to realize you are still making progress.
- Real recovery is not about wanting a quick fix but realizing it takes time for your body to heal.
- Real recovery is about doing the best you can and realizing you are human. You NEVER HAVE TO BE and NO ONE EXPECTS YOU TO BE perfect.
- Real recovery is having some days when you are super motivated and others when you are less so. It's also having the wisdom to realize that this is normal; there is nothing wrong with this.
- Real recovery is a journey of rediscovering who you are when you are free from the pain of bulimia.
- Real recovery will have unexpected challenges, new insights, twists and turns, fantastic discoveries, fears to be confronted, beliefs to be questioned and much more.
- Real recovery is the best gift you will ever give yourself in your life.

Setbacks form part of your healing.

As you progress in recovery, sometimes you will have days where you just can't be bothered. I call these "off" days.

You might say:

"I'm fed up with all this recovery business; I just don't care today".

It's normal to have off days. It is part of the progress of change. As your binge/ purge sessions

become less frequent you may discover that some buried emotions start to be released.

You may feel more emotional than usual. You may feel that you were better off before you started this recovery.

This is the part of you that is resistant to change and this part of you wants to stay in its comfort zone. It wants to rush back to the ‘comfort of a binge’.

You need to work with the protective side of your personality, and teach it that there really is nothing to fear.

When you take your protective self by the hand and teach it that there’s nothing to fear, you’ll quickly march towards a greater experience of freedom.

Bingeing is only a small part of a much bigger picture

Recovery from bulimia is like a jigsaw, there are many pieces that all fit together and bingeing is just one piece.

The feelings that come after a binge can feel like a big part of the recovery jigsaw; although, really, it's only a small piece of the bigger picture.

Other equally important elements of the recovery jigsaw include:

- Dealing with your food rules
- Tackling your irrational fat fears
- Reducing/ eliminating purging.
- Eating 3 meals and at least 2 snacks daily
- Ensuring that you do not get too hungry
- Getting your body back in balance
- Diffusing binge urges
- Learning to trust yourself

As you can see, to stop bingeing is only one part of the bigger puzzle and only one element. A relapse does not undermine your progress in all the other areas of recovery.

Forgive yourself after a relapse

What happens after you binge? What does your “self talk” sound like?

If you’re like most of us it probably sounds something like this...

“What an idiot, what was I thinking, I’m such a fool! I hate myself”.

Sound familiar?

Beating yourself up after a binge is so easy to do, but that doesn’t mean that you should do it. You really should go easy on yourself. Remember it’s not your fault you’re trapped in the distressed hunger state. Therefore, there is nothing to be ashamed of.

If you do relapse try telling yourself this...

Repeat after me:

“I am a normal human being,

Just like everyone else in my situation, I am experiencing relapses during recovery.

This is to be expected and is a VERY NORMAL part of my recovery process.

I fully forgive myself for this relapse.

I am not perfect, and I don't have to be. I am making progress and that's what counts.

There is nothing to be ashamed of.

I am WORTHY of the effort; I know it takes time to fully recover.”

It's not easy. Your old self-hatred habits will make it feel strange at first, but do try.

(This is also a great opportunity to practise and apply the diffusing techniques from stage 2 to any unwanted relapse thoughts.)

Every relapse is an opportunity to learn.

If you do relapse afterwards, put on your detective hat and start to figure out the reasons why. Once you understand why you relapsed you are now able to avoid another one in future.

Here are some good questions to ask yourself:

- Were you too hungry when you started eating?
- Were you paying attention as you ate?
- Did you pause or stop while eating?
- Did you eat too fast?
- Did you have too much on your plate?
- Were you depriving yourself of that particular food?
- Did you overeat because you fear you may deprive yourself of food later?
- Are you eating regular meals and snacks?
- Are you eating a variety of foods from all food groups? Or are you avoiding food groups e.g. fat?
- Are there gaps longer than 3 hours between meals and snacks?
- Did you continue to eat because you didn't want the food to go to waste?
- Are you eating snacks in between meals?
- Did you binge to suppress other feelings?
- Are you feeling stressed?
- Are you pushing yourself too hard in recovery?
- Do you have a tendency to eat more at a certain time of the day?
- Do you avoid foods you crave?
- Are you skipping meals?
- Are you purging after meals?
- Did you do an intense workout?
- Are you fighting the binge urge with willpower, rather than trying to diffuse the binge urge thoughts?
- Were you drinking alcohol or taking recreational drugs?
- Were you too far out of your normal comfort zone?

Recovery quote

“Although I didn't feel it at the time, in hindsight I'm incredibly grateful for the countless times I relapsed during recovery as the ensuing growth really laid the foundations for full recovery. It took me about 6 months before my behaviors improved, to the point of little to no relapses, and about a year before I considered myself fully recovered. I've been recovered nearly 3 years and I now have a really healthy relationship with food (probably more than most people/girls who have niggling issues with dieting and weight) and also with my body. So it's absolutely possible and so worth it! It's weird to say it but I'm actually really grateful for all of the struggles I experienced with the eating disorder”.

Recovery quote

“I'm quite different from a lot of people in recovery, in the sense that I didn't have my first relapse until I was just over 6 months into it. Not once, no bingeing, no purging, no overeating. I was so

strict with everything; I lived an almost militant life with my recovery. So when my first relapse came I was beyond devastated. Some things I thought at the time of my initial relapse: My entire world is falling apart/ I knew recovery was impossible/ It was good while it lasted/ I am a failure/ I will never do this/ maybe after all it is impossible to recover from ten years of bulimia/ back to square one. In reality NONE of this was the truth. Thankfully something in me realized that and kept fighting. I relapsed a few more times since then too but the thoughts that come along with relapsing really do change as recovery time goes by.”

Measuring progress

Relapsing does not mean you are not making progress.

Indications of progress include:

- Longer periods between binge urges
- A shorter duration of binge urges
- A reduction in the intensity of your binge urges.
- Binges on smaller amounts of food
- The ability to stop in the middle of a binge
- Bouncing back more quickly when a binge happens
- Managing to stop the binge happening
- Not continue with purging
- Not purging at all.
- Successfully diffusing binge urges
- Successfully coping with trigger environments.
- Less time spent obsessing or thinking about food.

A relapse does not mean you aren't making progress.

Here are two examples:

Example 1: John has not relapsed for two months but he is still restricting his food intake. The URGE to binge is still very strong. John struggles hard each day to fight the binge urge and he is not sure how long he can resist.

Example 2: Michelle has relapses around once a week, but she has also stopped restricting and stopped purging. Her binges have been getting less frequent, less intense and are now shorter in duration. The binge URGE is much weaker than it ever was before. She feels like she is moving towards recovery.

Although it may seem from an outsider's point of view that John is making more progress in recovery, he is actually not. He is still restricting his food intake and his BINGE URGE is still very strong.

It is Michelle who is making better progress. She has stopped restricting and her binge urges have weakened significantly and eventually they will disappear totally.

Just because John is resisting the binge urge with willpower, it doesn't mean he is any closer to recovery. The binge urge is still there in full force. John needs to stop restricting his food intake to remove the binge urge not fight it with willpower.

Be careful counting the days since your last relapse.

It can be exciting counting the days since you last relapsed, but you need to be really careful.

Counting down days usually means that if a binge does happen, the binge counter is 'reset' to zero.

This can then seem like all your efforts have been a waste of time.

If you must count the days since you relapsed, think of it as a little fun and not a true indication of recovery or progress.

How can I tell the difference between overeating and binge?

In the earlier stages of recovery while you're still adapting to structured eating it is normal to experience episodes of overeating and continuing episodes of binge eating. But do you know how to differentiate between the two?

Most formal definitions of bingeing insist that it always involves eating "a large amount of food over a short period of time" and while this is definitely true for some, in general it is the element of loss of control that signals a binge – regardless of the quantity of food you've eaten.

So...

The number one indicator of binge eating is feeling a loss of control while eating - regardless of the quantity (or type) of food that you're eating.

Other signs of bingeing are eating to comfort unwanted thoughts and emotions, eating very rapidly, eating alone and experiencing feelings of shame, guilt, disgust and depression afterwards.

Entering a trance-like headspace is also a certain sign that you've experienced a binge!

Overeating however, has a number of subtle differences. So, after overeating you may still feel some guilt but usually there are no feelings of loss of control. You have still eaten more food than your body needed at that time but the reasons are completely different.

For example, lots of people overeat because they've missed a meal earlier that day and they're very hungry or because the food they're eating tastes really great and they want to finish it even though they're already quite full. This is a normal behaviour that everyone experiences from time to time, so try to not confuse it with bingeing.

In Summary

- Realize that real recovery happens GRADUALLY.
- Realize that there will always be ups and downs in recovery
- Understand that setbacks do happen, they are normal and you will move on from them.
- Never underestimate how helpful a relapse can actually be. You can learn so much from them in the end.
- Persistence will always carry you through the harder times
- Learn to forgive yourself after a relapse - it is not your fault!
- Use the diffusion technique for any unwanted relapse thoughts.
- Look out for signs of progress like successfully diffusing binge urges and bouncing back more quickly when a binge does happen, rather than simply counting the days to measure your progress.

Stage 2: Diffusing the mind binge urge

Huge strides can now be made in your recovery progress IF you have completely stopped restricting your food intake.

Your NUMBER 1 goal throughout recovery is to feed your body the nutrition it needs.

Now, that said, you can move on to this stage, and start to diffuse the mind binge urge, as long as

you are also working on your structured eating (Which will gradually eliminate the body binge urge).

In this stage you will learn new coping skills and explore the interesting relationship between bingeing and your thoughts and emotions.

About Mind Binge Urges

Why do we experience binge urges?

If you are feeding your body all the nutrition it needs and if you are NOT hungry, then why on earth do you still experience cravings to binge on food?

There are two reasons.

1. It takes time for the Body Binge Urges to disappear.

All bulimics will experience the Body Binge Urge initially. For some, curing this binge urge alone is enough for a full recovery. By following the steps in Stage 1 this urge to binge will eventually disappear.

Even if you have been following all the steps of Stage 1 and you are feeding your body everything it needs, you can still expect to experience binge urges for at least a few months (usually around 3-8 months). Like the aftershocks following an earthquake, over time the body binge urges will become less intense and frequent, eventually disappearing.

2. We may be experiencing Mind Binge Urges.

Even though we may have been following a structured eating program for months and have removed all our Body Binge Urges we may still experience Mind Binge Urges.

If you have had bulimia for a long time you may be relying on it for emotional support. This is a strong desire to eat food not for hunger but to dull the thought processes and numb any emotional pain.

Unlike body binge urges where your whole body feels hungry, these urges create feelings of “hunger” above the neck and are usually triggered by an uncomfortable feeling or emotion such as stress or anxiety.

It is generally associated with avoidance, whether it is something tangible such as work obligations or something intangible like emotions. The mind binge urge wasn't created by hunger, so eating food and following a structured eating program will not resolve it.

“Why do we experience Mind Binge Urges?”

Because over time we have learnt that eating large amounts of food can trigger an endorphin release and this helps dull any uncomfortable emotions or feelings.

Research has proven that eating certain foods, especially those with high sugar and fat combinations (e.g. ice cream, chocolate, doughnuts, cakes, and pies) produce “feel good” chemicals like serotonin and other endorphins in our brains.

Endorphins are powerful, natural opiates that allow you to experience pleasure, a reduction in pain

and lower levels of stress.

Bingeing on food causes a flood of endorphins to surge through your brain which can temporarily infuse you with a sense of numbness or euphoria.

If you've ever experienced that trance-like state during an episode of bulimia, or felt "high" afterwards then you can point the finger at this endorphin rush.

Please note: Bingeing may lead to an immediate endorphin release but in the long run it makes you feel more miserable!

Unfortunately for those who binge, studies show that the feelings of disgust and self hatred that follow a binge COMPLETELY cancel out any positive effects.

"Why don't I feel like exercising or meditating to stimulate an endorphin release? Why do I specifically rely on bingeing on food?"

There are many ways to get a release of endorphins. They are released naturally during exercise, when you laugh, listen to music, meditate and even after thinking positive thoughts! So why do you specifically crave bingeing on food rather than going for a jog for example?

Because bingeing has become a LEARNED behaviour.

You were not born with the desire to binge to make yourself temporarily feel better.

Somewhere along the line you LEARNED to do this.

Say for example you suffer from a little anxiety (as most of us do from time to time).

One time when you were anxious you binged on food to calm your nerves.

If you continue to repeat this process, over time your brain LEARNS to prepare for a binge whenever it experiences any feelings of anxiety.

Binging and purging then become a HABIT employed to deal with anxiety.

Any feelings of anxiety have now become a potential binge trigger.

Gradually, over time, more and more feelings and situations start to become automatic triggers for a binge.

Eventually any unwanted or negative experience, thought or feeling can become a binge trigger.

Stress, anxiety, unpleasant emotions, scary thoughts, seeing yourself in the mirror, going to the beach. Anything at all really.

It's similar to the famous Pavlov's dogs experiment, where the dog was conditioned to expect food at the sound of a bell. It didn't matter if the dog was hungry or not, over time Pavlov had trained his dog to expect food every time it heard a bell. The bell had become a trigger for eating food.

It's also similar to the smoker who craves a cigarette every time they have a beer.

Or the jogger who has had a stressful day at work and is craving to go for a jog to get their endorphin fix.

If "triggers" are making me binge, should I just avoid all triggers?

Early in recovery it actually does make sense to avoid triggers when possible.

There is no need to put yourself under unnecessary pressure. If you know something is **a big trigger for you, then it makes sense to avoid that trigger.**

For the first few months of recovery give yourself permission to do whatever you can to avoid any triggers. Avoid unnecessary stress and anxiety.

Recovery quote

"I found it helpful to have a piece of paper with pre-written scripts for getting out of social obligations. This was very important for my early recovery. It's okay to say no."

Although, in reality it's nearly impossible to avoid all triggers.

The problem is that there could literally be hundreds of triggers. Even if you did manage to avoid them all, is this really living your life fully?

It's kind of like having a broken leg and instead of fixing the leg you decide to remove every conceivable situation in your life where you might be required to walk.

Therefore if you don't need to walk, well it doesn't matter if you have a broken leg.

Obviously it makes more sense just to heal the leg.

Doesn't it make more sense to change your reaction to these triggers so they no longer make you want to binge on food. Rather than attempting to remove every single trigger from your life?

Change YOUR reaction to the trigger

Think of it this way...

You probably experienced the exact same triggers before you had bulimia and you will experience the exact same triggers after you recover.

The situations are the exact same.

The only difference is that after you recover, the triggers don't create an urge to binge.

The only thing that has changed is your reaction to the triggers.

We need to focus our attention, NOT on removing the triggers, but on changing our REACTION to the triggers.

And I can show you how to easily change your reaction to a trigger.

'Life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it.'

-John Maxwell

Recovery quote

"Yes! Just today, I saw my ex-boyfriend. I experienced a milder version of some of the same feelings that used to trigger intense binges. Today, bingeing didn't even occur to me as an option. I went on a walk, cried for about 5 minutes, and then planned my upcoming week. When I was bulimic, I couldn't imagine how I would cope without bingeing. But, it's actually far easier now, because I don't have the battle with myself on TOP of everything else. Half of my grief in those situations was about the bulimia itself, not the trigger. And I didn't even realize it. In short: life is SO MUCH EASIER AND BETTER without bulimia."

"So how do you change your reaction to a binge trigger?"

Well the first and most important step is to realise that in reality **there is no such thing as a binge trigger!**

Confused? Let me explain....

What happens when something triggers an urge to binge?

Well, you experience an urge to binge.

You DO NOT experience a binge.

You experience an “URGE” to binge.

And that is a simple but VERY important distinction.

Triggers only create URGES to binge.

There is no such thing as a binge trigger. There is only such thing as an “urge trigger”

The reality is that a trigger creates a binge urge and then the binge urge leads to a binge.

The steps are:

Trigger - binge urge - binge.

The trigger is not to blame, **the binge urge is to blame.**

This is good news because we cannot change our triggers but we CAN change our reaction to the binge urge.

"Ok, so how do you change your reaction to a binge URGE trigger?"

We can learn to do this by applying a technique called Binge Urge Diffusion.

Diffusion is one of the main techniques used in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy - a powerful new psychological approach based on mindfulness skills.

By using Binge Urge Diffusion we can learn to reduce the power of a binge urge and in time and with practise the urge will disappear.

The TRUE reason you binge

Let's break it down and make it really simple.

You don't binge because of your emotions.

You don't binge because of your thoughts.

You don't binge because of stress, your parents, or going to the beach.

Yes any of these may **trigger a binge urge.**

But they do **NOT make you binge.**

The only reason you binge is to COPE with your urges to binge.

The only THING binge eating does is to help remove the discomfort of a binge urge.

That's it.

In its simplest form...

The only reason you binge is to COPE with your urges to binge.

Now imagine this for a second...

What if you could turn down the power of a binge urge so you could easily cope?

What if experiencing a binge urge didn't bother you so much and you could brush it off?

That's where Binge Urge Diffusion comes in.

Bingeing and Emotions

“But I binge to cope with emotions, not because I cannot cope with the binge urge!”

Do you really?

Are you bingeing to cope with a binge urge or to cope with emotions?

Spend a moment imagining this scenario

Something happens in your day that triggers an uncomfortable emotion.

This makes you feel insecure and depressed.

Normally these emotions would trigger a binge but the strange thing is:

You have NO urge to binge at all.

Nothing.

You still feel the uncomfortable emotion, but there is **no urge to eat food**.

Now the question is...

Would you still binge on food to deal with the uncomfortable emotion even though you had no urge to binge?

I am guessing.... of course not.

That would be like smoking a cigarette to help calm your nerves even though you don't smoke or have no desire to do so.

“But bulimia helps me manage my emotions, it's not just about COPING with a binge urge”

If bulimia helps you manage your emotions then you must be blissfully happy and always content.

I am guessing not.

This is one of the **biggest illusions with bulimia**.

Bulimia doesn't control your emotions. It makes your emotions worse and destroys your well-being.

Bulimia wears you down day by day. Bulimia erodes your confidence, creates anxious, warped thoughts, and steals your self-esteem.

Without bulimia your emotions will be MUCH more manageable and positive.

“So are you saying my emotions are NOT to blame for my bulimia?”

Emotions are not to blame. We may think they are but it is only because we have been conditioned to experience a binge urge when we experience certain emotions.

Yes it is true that some emotions such as anxiety may trigger binge urges more often than others, and it's also true these emotions may be very uncomfortable, but it still doesn't make them responsible for our bulimia.

OK, think of it this way...

Non-bulimics who are perfectly healthy still experience negative thoughts and feelings.

But even though they experience negative thoughts and feelings they do not experience any binge urges.

Why?

Because they ARE NOT CONDITIONED to experience a binge urge whenever they have a negative thought or emotion.

Now take a moment to imagine sometime in the near future when you are **fully recovered** from bulimia.

Of course this is fantastic; life, in general, has vastly improved!

But now take a moment to imagine that even though you are recovered, you are still having a really horrible day. Nothing is going right for you, perhaps you're having a bad day at work, you feel a little miserable, fed up and totally stressed.

But because you have recovered you have no desire to binge.

So what's changed?

You are still having negative emotions.

So obviously they cannot be to blame.

The only thing that has changed (besides the fact that you have now re-balanced your body via the Stage 1 steps) is that you are no longer CONDITIONED to experience a binge urge when you feel a negative emotion.

This is GREAT news as it's extremely challenging to change our emotions, but it's not so challenging to remove the conditioning.

We can do this using the Binge Urge Diffusion technique.

We can learn to diffuse the power of an emotion so we can cope with it, irrespective of what our emotional state is.

“So I should stop blaming my emotions?”

Yes.

Please stop blaming your emotions.

At times everyone feels insecure, vulnerable, anxious, miserable and not good enough; this is just part of being a normal human being. These are normal natural emotions. They are not wrong.

I don't know anyone who is 100% totally confident.

Lacking confidence is normal. Everyone has times where they feel more confident than others. Sure you can feel confident tying your shoes but how confident would you feel speaking in front of a large crowd or tackling a lion with your bare hands?

Feeling uncomfortable and unwanted emotions is not wrong. You are suffering from bulimia, it is destroying your life, making you miserable and slowly killing you. How can you be expected to feel happy, confident and secure?

Your emotions and feelings are not faulty. **You are normal.**

Believing that you are broken or messed up only makes you more miserable. Living with Bulimia is tough enough without bashing ourselves for the way we are.

“But I don’t like my emotions, I don’t like being negative all the time, I want to change! I don’t want to accept myself the way I am right now!”

I am not asking you to LIKE how you think and feel right now. Living with bulimia is misery. You don’t have to like it.

I am just asking you to ACCEPT that this is the way you are right now and that it doesn’t help to beat yourself up any more because of it.

It’s like owning an old car that you don’t like. Just because you don’t like your car doesn’t mean you need to get a big stick and start to smash it up.

Doesn’t it make more sense to make peace with the fact that your car isn’t so great, but know that in time you will be upgrading to a new improved model?

“But I want to change who I am?”

Of course you do!

No one could possibly want to live with all the stress, anxiety and unhappiness that comes with bulimia.

The best way to improve your self-esteem, your well-being, your happiness, your confidence and your life is to STOP BEING BULIMIC.

“But I can’t cope with my emotions! Bulimia helps to shut them out!”

Is it really helping you cope?

What you are really saying is that it works as a distraction from other problems.

These are perhaps other problems that wouldn’t feel so BIG if you were not bulimic. Or other problems you would be able to cope better with if you weren’t bingeing and purging.

With bulimia small challenges can seem SO much bigger. The constant stress, anxiety, obsession, hunger and panic only add further burden to your everyday life.

Bulimia is making your life harder to cope with, not easier. If you didn’t have bulimia, life would be much easier.

Deep down you know this is true.

Recovery quote

“This is it exactly. Difficult emotions that would normally register at a 5 on a scale of 1-10 register at a 9.9 because the bulimia itself makes them more intense. It brings in the conflict of will, the physical cravings, and the effects of chemical imbalances from bingeing and dehydration. Not to mention that bingeing creates additional stressors. I think most bulimics can tell their bulimia is causing stress (financial, social, shame). You must understand the physical pattern of bulimia is exacerbating the emotional reactions.”

“I don’t binge just to cope with the binge urge, bulimia comforts me. It gives me

something in return.”

It's an ILLUSION that bulimia gives you ANYTHING in return. It's all part of the ingenious bulimia trap.

Let's look at it this way...

Could you convince a non-bulimic to become bulimic?

If you had children would you encourage them to be bulimic?

"Come on kids, it will help you deal with your emotions, though it won't help you lose weight and in fact it will slowly destroy your life and eventually kill you."

Can you see how detrimental these excuses are and how much of your thinking has been distorted by the bulimia illusion?

Bulimia closes your mind.

Bulimia makes you weak and insecure.

Everyone needs to eat food but no one needs to gorge on huge quantities of it!

Open your mind, there is NOTHING TO GIVE UP.

Bulimia gives you nothing it just takes, takes and takes!

“So you are saying I should believe bulimia gives me NOTHING in return”

Yes.

Absolutely.

Just because you do something doesn't mean you have to have a good reason for doing it.

Lots of people do things that are obviously of NO benefit to them.

How many benefits are there to being a heroin addict?

How many good reasons can you think of for smoking?

Your bulimia doesn't have to have a function, it doesn't need to offer you any benefit, it doesn't need to fulfill some hidden need.

I understand that this may be difficult to take on board, but for recovery it can really help us when we accept the **reality that bulimia gives us nothing**.

If we wrongly believe bulimia gives us something we may feel like we are missing out.

Perhaps we may feel like we are giving up something of value.

Or that we won't be able to cope without it.

Or worse we may invent some problem or need just to justify its existence.

Understand that bulimia gives you nothing of benefit, all it does **is destroy your life**.

Life without bulimia will be infinitely better.

Don't worry if you don't fully believe this right now.

All I ask is that you give it a chance.

Accept that there is a chance your life will be **SO MUCH** better once you are recovered.

As you progress through recovery you will realise this to be true.

The ONLY thing bulimia does is remove the discomfort of the Binge Urge.

And pretty soon by using Binge Urge Diffusion you won't need bulimia for that either.

Recovery quote

"I always thought bulimia was my crutch. I thought I couldn't cope with life without it. Recovery has taught me that I can cope SO MUCH BETTER without bulimia. I have energy, time, patience and understanding now and I am emotionally stronger than I've ever been."

In Summary

- We have been conditioned to think about bingeing on food in different circumstances. It has nothing to do with who we are or our upbringing, it's just the way our brains work.
- We wrongly believe that having a binge urge means we are broken and messed up. This mistaken association makes us feel more miserable, depressed, stressed and anxious every time we experience a binge urge. In reality it's not a personal inadequacy, it's a conditioned response.
- We may wrongly believe that our emotions are responsible for our bulimia. So we relent to disordered eating any time we have a negative emotion and this adds a lot of anxiety, stress and deeper despair on top of the negative emotion. When the truth is, there is nothing wrong with feeling a negative emotion.
- We believe we are powerless against binge triggers, without even realising we do have the power to change how we react to them.
- We hold onto the faulty belief that bulimia is helping us to cope with our emotions and with the stresses of life; and we panic at the thought of throwing our worthless crutch away.
- We binge because we find it difficult to COPE with the binge urge.

Popular techniques to deal with Mind Binge Urges

Many of us find it really challenging to fight against the mind binge urge. This is because many of the techniques people tend to use aren't very effective.

Let's look at some of the more common techniques for fighting a binge urge.

Technique 1: We try to suppress the thought and think about something else.

Many self-help books and gurus proclaim that if you recognize a negative thought the best thing you can do is quickly start thinking of something else.

This is a good idea in principle, but unfortunately it just doesn't work in the long run.

In fact thought suppression studies have proven that the more you try to suppress a thought, the more the unwanted thought keeps popping up. (Wegner, D. M., Schneider, D. J., Carter, S., III, & White, L. (1987). Paradoxical effects of thought suppression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 409–418.)

The main reason for this is that we have very little control over what we think about. Our thoughts have a life of their own and most thoughts just pop up out of the ether. We cannot control what we think about. It just doesn't work that way.

Here is a little experiment to prove you don't have any real control over what you think about.

Try not to think about a pink elephant.

Well did you think about one?

Of course you did. See what I mean?

The truth is no matter how hard we try to suppress unwanted thoughts eventually they always come back. And the more we try to suppress them the more frequently they come back.

So although we may replace one binge urge thought, it doesn't take long for another one to appear in its place. Eventually we just get tired of all the mental exertion and binge to get our mind to shut up at least for a few minutes.

It would be great if we could just turn off all those unwanted thoughts like turning off a tap, but unfortunately studies show it's not possible.

Technique 2: Arguing with the Mind Binge Urge using rational arguments

For many bulimics whenever they experience a binge urge thought, they immediately try to wrestle it to the ground and strangle it out of existence.

They argue with it using all their energy.

Attempting to argue with your binge urges is pointless. They do not listen.

The mind binge urges are coming from a primitive part of your brain.

And it's too primitive to understand rational arguments.

You could have the most compelling arguments in the world not to binge, but it still isn't going to get rid of these thoughts.

They don't listen to logic.

It's like fighting with your echo.

Each time you shout an insult it shouts an equally harsh one back.

You could do this all day and get nowhere.

Studies show by struggling against a thought we imprint it deeper into our brains and are therefore more likely to have that very thought we are trying to erase.

Think about how many times you've tried to talk yourself out of a binge and how often has it worked?

Technique 3: Trying to only think positive thoughts.

Many bulimics are led to believe that their thoughts and feelings are the source of their bulimia.

Many try to continually think only positive thoughts in the hope that it will remove the binge urge.

This has the unfortunate side effect of making us over judge and over analyze our thoughts.

As each thought goes through our mind we rate it.

Each thought has to be audited to see if it is good enough. If it's a good thought it passes, but if it's a bad thought we feel like we are broken, or have wronged in some way. We immediately try to wrestle the thought out of existence.

There are four reasons this approach doesn't work.

1. We have no control over what we think about.

2. Trying to suppress a thought only makes it stronger.
3. Trying to think only positive thoughts is exhausting.
4. It's normal to have negative thoughts.

Studies show that 80% of daily thoughts tend to have a negative element to them. Humans are naturally a little negative by nature.

On top of that you have bulimia, you are malnourished, you are mentally and physically exhausted and you are suffering all the psychological side effects of a restrictive diet.

It's really very normal to have negative thoughts.

It's the most normal thing in the world.

In fact it's much more common than having happy thoughts.

If we learn to be more comfortable with, and accepting of, our thoughts and feelings they would sit better with us. They wouldn't feel so bad and wouldn't give us so much bother.

In Summary

Studies show that most of these techniques don't work and each time we lose the fight against a binge urge it reinforces the belief that we are trapped forever with our bulimia, that we are broken or that we don't have enough willpower.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It's the techniques we are using to fight our binge urges that aren't very effective.

Think about every effort you've made to get rid of those binge urge thoughts. You might have tried to challenge them with logic or drown them out.

But did any of these efforts ever really work in the long run?

I am guessing not.

Binge Urge Diffusion.

Let us now explore a new technique to deal with Mind Binge Urges. It is called "Binge Urge Diffusion" and it follows a simple 4 step technique.

Whenever we experience a binge urge thought or feeling we can apply this 4 step technique.

Step 1: Notice you are having a binge urge

Step 2: Don't argue or fight with the binge urge

Step 3: Make peace with the binge urge

Step 4: Move on and focus on something else.

Let's look at each of these steps in a little more detail.

Step 1: Notice you are having a binge urge

The first step is to notice a binge urge as soon as it appears.

As soon as you notice a binge urge such as, “I want to binge,” say out loud (or in your head if people are about) “I’m having the thought I want to binge”

Put the phrase “I am having the thought” before the actual thought.

This helps to give you some distance from the binge urge.

The binge urge stops being you.

It helps you observe the thought as something separate from you as a person.

Realize that your binge urge thought is just words.

A series of words in a row, nothing more, nothing less.

Split the thought into separate words and realize that each individual word is truly powerless.

This will help you see the thought for what it is... it’s just a thought.

If your binge urge is more a feeling than a thought, then put the phrase “I am having the feeling” before describing the feeling.

“I am having the feeling that I am bored and I want to binge”

This will help you see the feeling for what it is... it’s just a feeling.

Step 2: Don’t argue or fight with the binge urge

For many bulimics whenever they notice they are having a binge urge, as a thought or feeling, their natural reaction is to try and get rid of it. Unfortunately, as we have shown, this doesn’t work. If you try to get rid of thoughts you will only make them stronger.

For this step I want you to resist fighting against the binge urge.

Don’t try to distract yourself,

Don’t try and push the thoughts and feelings away,

Don’t try to rewrite the thought,

Don’t try to argue with the thought,

Don't try to figure out the emotional need,

Don't worry about what triggered the binge urge,

Don’t even try to label it.

Just let it be.

No matter what you do, these thoughts are going to appear, so why add additional stress and anxiety by trying to fight them. It doesn’t help and only makes matters worse.

Your attitude of acceptance is so important here. When you stop fighting thoughts and feelings they sit with you more comfortably and pass more quickly.

Step 3: Make peace with the binge urge

Think of your binge urge NOT as a monster but more as a confused friend.

Realise the binge urge has your best intentions at heart.

It's only trying to protect you from any uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

Let it know, that although you appreciate its concern, you will no longer be using its services.

Instead of fighting the binge urge I want you to embrace it. I want you to rouse up some inner warmth towards the binge urge and give it little soft mind hug. Be gentle and tender towards your binge urge thoughts and feelings.

I am not asking to like the binge urge,

I am sure you would rather the feeling was not there.

It's OK to want to get rid of the binge urge. That's understandable.

But you don't have to struggle and fight it.

The attitude of acceptance is really important. **Open your mind and make peace** with the binge urge.

This powerful technique will help to diffuse the power behind the urge and remove any fear and anxiety associated with it. This makes the binge urge much less threatening and it puts you in a more empowered position.

Step 4: Move on and focus on something else

A binge urge does a great job of claiming your attention and your focus.

Instead I want you to allow the urge to come and go as it pleases, stop struggling and move your attention and focus on something else.

Focus on and engage fully in something.

Remain interested in what you were doing and just let the binge urge be.

Try not to get emotionally involved with the binge urge.

Let the thoughts and feelings flow through your mind but don't take interest in them and instead focus on whatever it is you were doing.

Allow the binge urge to rise and pass, build up and fall down again and instead focus your attention on something else.

Eventually the binge urge will pass.

It might take 5 minutes or 20 minutes or longer.

Just continue to remain focused on and engaged in what you were doing prior to the binge urge appearing.

Recovery quote

"I remember the first time I sat through and with a negative binge/purge urge. This was sooo tough. After the urge passed I felt on top of the world because I had conquered the urge. I did not die because I was so uncomfortable"

About the technique

What is the science behind diffusion?

Diffusing helps to rewire the neural pathways in your brain so you no longer crave a binge.

Author Kathryn Hansen explores the connection between your brain and bingeing in her fantastic book "Brain over Binge". She can explain it much better than I can.

"The urges to binge come from an older part of the brain in terms of evolutionary history - the primitive brain or animal brain; or as I call it in my book - the lower brain. The lower brain generates our instinctual drives for food, water, oxygen, and other things it senses are necessary for survival. This is the part of the brain that produces "primal hunger" - the adaptive response to dieting - which leads to binge eating.

Once binge eating commences, it is highly habit forming because it is very rewarding and reinforcing to the lower brain centers; and as binge eating is repeated many times, brain pathways physically change to accommodate the behavior. This is why, even in the absence of food deprivation, the lower brain can still be conditioned to binge and can still continue sending out those powerful urges.

The good news is that you are more than your lower brain. Your true self, residing in the higher-functioning, rational part of your uniquely human brain, has the capacity to override the automatic, primitive urges from your lower brain. No matter what thoughts, feelings, or cravings your lower brain generates, you always remain in control of your actions. From the first time you can experience an urge to binge without acting on it, you will begin to decondition the habit. The neural connections and pathways that once supported binge eating will weaken, and the urges will gradually fade away."

Experiment with it.

After you become comfortable with the technique you can be creative with it. Perhaps you can imagine your anxious thoughts as coming from a non threatening cartoon character such as Buzz Lightyear or Mickey Mouse.

"I imagine myself like in a police shoot (really silly I know) and say to myself STOP! put your hands up and walk away from the binge."

"One thing I did was to expect the cravings to be worse than I knew they would be. This might just stress people out, but it worked for me. I would briefly think of more intense forms of pain and then think, "All this is, is pain. And, it's not the worst pain of my life. This is doable."

With practice you will find what works best for you, and it is perfectly fine to use that evolved approach.

“So are you saying I shouldn’t react emotionally to a binge urge?”

Yes, because by reacting emotionally to a binge urge you make it much more difficult to cope with. Remember by focusing on the binge urge we give it power. By fighting with the binge urge we make it stronger.

Remember, as long as you are feeding your body the nutrition it needs, your binge urge **means NOTHING**.

It’s simply an automatic reaction

It’s happening because your brain has been conditioned to crave a binge under certain conditions, that’s all.

It has nothing to do with who you are. So do not let it cause you any unnecessary stress or strain.

Do not give it any unnecessary attention.

See it for what it really is, a by-product of conditioning.

Accept the urge to binge as a side effect of conditioning and let it be, make peace with it, and focus on something else.

“What if I am in a stressful situation, what should I do?”

If you were doing any activity that was causing stress then it makes sense to focus on something else. Perhaps instead go for a walk and catch a breath of fresh air.

Also if you were eating food and experienced a binge urge, it makes sense to walk away and instead move your attention to something else.

“This isn’t working, what’s wrong?”

At times diffusing a binge urge thought can be easy.

At other times it may not happen at all.

This is perfectly normal.

The good news is that like any new skill the more you practise the easier it becomes.

“Why aren’t the binge urges going away?”

The goal here is not to get rid of the binge urge thoughts.

The goal here is to diffuse their power and to make peace with them.

It will take time for the binge urge thoughts to weaken and disappear.

If you are trying to get rid of your binge urge thoughts at this stage you will be disappointed.

Other Techniques

Binge Urge Diffusion is great, but it can be a challenge at times too. Here are a few other strategies you can use in conjunction with Binge Urge Diffusion.

The STOP moving technique

You can apply this technique if you find yourself moving towards a binge.

Binge urge diffusion takes practise and until you develop your skills in this regard you may find yourself investing your binge urge thoughts with emotions.

This makes them more powerful,

and may lead you to ACT on your thoughts.

ACTING on a thought means a movement.

Should you find yourself going towards the fridge for a binge....

the very moment you notice your BODY react with movement to the thought... STOP MOVING !!

STAND COMPLETELY STILL.

REALISE that your thoughts cannot make you MOVE.

The urge is powerless UNLESS you ACT on it.

Realise your body is totally unaffected.

You may feel waves or a compulsion to binge.

But they cannot make you move.

They are not dangerous.

They do not need to be fought.

Remember this fact with conviction.

You do NOT want to binge.

No matter what your thoughts and emotions are telling you.

This isn't you.

The real you does not want to binge.

Move away from any food, preferably to a safe environment and follow the "diffusing a binge" steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 again.

Recovery quote

"I did this without realizing it was a technique. I'd hide in my bed or go to a movie just to feel stillness"

Distractions

Distraction is a useful tool in the beginning but is not something that is supposed to see you through the entire recovery process. Distraction can prevent a binge but it doesn't allow you to change your thoughts in relation to your bulimia. For that you will need to use the diffusion method.

Anything that fully engages you and takes you away from the stressful environment can work as a distraction. If you distract yourself long enough eventually the binge urge will pass and disappear.

Any distraction will do, go for a walk, go to the cinema, phone a friend, dance a jig, go to sleep...

Recovery quote

"I remember my 3rd week into recovery my husband had to leave for a two week business trip. Up to this point I was doing great in recovery but a few days into his trip, my two small children had put me over the edge. They were fighting and crying and sick and so badly I just wanted to take myself to the store and buy as many candy bars as I could see. Instead, I fought back. I took my phone and texted my spouse telling him the immense amount of stress I was feeling. He quickly texted back that I must distract or change what I was currently doing. I ran downstairs and began playing with my children, jumping around and singing with my kids, and within 20 mins the urge was gone. At that moment I realized I was in control. It didn't need to control me."

Tapping

Although it doesn't work for everyone, a good percentage of people say EFT (Emotional Freedom Therapy) or tapping works for them. Try it out and see if it works for you. If you are interested in finding out more, just google "EFT tapping".

Use this technique to relieve binge urges, uncomfortable emotions, anxious thoughts and stressful occasions.

1. Intentionally summon the biggest feeling of this emotion (or binge urge) you can.
2. Rate your emotion on a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest.
3. With two fingers, tap ten times under your collarbone while you think about the emotion. Tap solidly, but not nearly enough to hurt, about five taps will do. Note: It doesn't matter whether you tap on the left or right side of the body.
4. Using two fingers, tap under the eye about two centimeters below the bottom of the eyeball, at the center of the bony orbit, high on the cheek.
5. Tap under your collarbone again.
6. Place your other hand in front of you and tap the back of it between the ring and little fingers.
7. Then close your eyes and open them.
8. Keep tapping and look down to the right, then down to the left.
9. Keep tapping and rotate eyes 360° clockwise, then 360° anti-clockwise.
10. Hum Happy Birthday aloud.
11. Count out loud, one to five.
12. Hum Happy Birthday again.
13. Stop and check - on a scale of one to ten, where is your uncomfortable emotion now? Repeat until uncomfortable emotions have gone.

Applying Diffusion to your life.

Other uses for this technique

The diffusion technique can be used for more than binge urges. It can also help you deal with unwanted thoughts, anxiety and urges to purge.

Diffusing unwanted thoughts

Studies show that we don't have any control over our thoughts. Our thoughts seem to have a life of their own and we just come along for the ride.

Most of our daily thoughts are pointless, silly or just plain useless. Most of them we tend to ignore throughout the day and we usually forget them soon after they arrive.

But every now and then we have a thought which causes a powerful emotional reaction.

Out of the blue we may think

"I'm such a pig, no wonder everyone hates me."

or

“Bulimia is going to kill me and I will never recover.”

Bam!

You feel a churning in your stomach.

You feel heavier, more worried, more depressed and more anxious.

You may feel like bingeing.

All of a sudden a simple thought has the power to completely knock the wind out your sails.

So why did this thought cause so much distress compared to other thoughts?

Because you attached an emotional reaction to the thought.

Thoughts in themselves are powerless.

They cannot make you do anything.

It's only when we attach an emotional reaction to a thought that it gains power.

For example

Here is a thought, “In general a table has four legs.” Now I am pretty sure that this thought has caused no reaction in you.

But what if you had the thought, “I hate myself and I want to binge.”

Now I am sure that this thought had a stronger impact on you.

But that's only because it has a stronger EMOTIONAL impact on you.

The thought itself has NO power.

Have you ever heard the expression “thoughts sticking like glue?” The very act of reacting emotionally to a thought glues it to you all the more, and the more you worry and obsess about the thought, the more that glue becomes hardened over time.

Thoughts that create an emotional reaction can trigger a binge urge.

How we judge thoughts determines how much impact they have on our lives.

What if the thought, “I hate myself and I want to binge” had the same emotional impact as “In general a table has four legs”

It would be powerless.

It would not cause any fear.

It would not cause any anxiety,

And within a few moments we would forget we even had the thought .

We can accomplish this by using the Diffusion Technique.

Step 1: Notice you are having a negative thought.

As soon as you notice you are having an unwanted negative thought, label it and say to yourself “I am having the thought X”

For example say to yourself "I am having the thought I hate myself". This helps to put some distance between you and the thought.

Step 2: Don't argue or fight with the thought

Don't try and push the thought away,

Don't try to rewrite the thought,

Don't try to argue with the thought.

Step 3: Make peace with the thought.

Warmly welcome the thoughts that emerge. Develop the habit of being gentle and tender towards all your thoughts no matter what they are.

Step 4: Move on and focus on something else.

Treat the thought like any one of the thousands of fleeting thoughts you have throughout the day. Just let it be, move on

and focus on whatever you were doing.

This powerful technique can be applied to any unwanted negative thoughts.

The idea of acceptance is key to your recovery. Your attitude at this stage of recovering will make all the difference. A thought is powerless unless you attach an emotion to it.

If you have no interest in a particular thought then it loses its hold over you.

You can casually ignore it and get on with your day.

Everyone has negative thoughts throughout the day so feel free to practise this technique whenever you have a moment to spare.

Over time you can build up a history of thoughts you have successfully diffused.

This makes it easier when they come round again.

Oh look here is the, “I am worthless” thought.

Recall that you overcame it before and you can do it again.

Recovery quote

“This has been so critical to my recovery. The more I’ve just let the negative thoughts come and go without attaching any judgement to them the stronger and more confident I’ve felt.”

“I have unpleasant thoughts that undermine my recovery, what can I do?”

You may have thoughts such as:

“I am never going to recover I might as well binge.”

“I fail at everything, why try.. ...just have a binge.”

“My urges are not going away.... they are getting stronger! This isn’t working.”

“I will always have bulimia, I am a stupid idiot for thinking I could ever get better!”

Unfortunately you will experience these types of thoughts. This is quite normal and is to be expected. You cannot change the fact that you will continue to have unpleasant thoughts which try to undermine your recovery.

Again we need to keep in mind that these are just thoughts.

A series of words.

They do not have the power to make you act and they are not real.

If you find yourself believing these thoughts just follow the 4 steps to diffuse them.

“I have the same thoughts over and over”

Some negative thoughts are more persistent than others. Some will show up much more often than others but there is no need to panic. This is normal. Just acknowledge that some thoughts will show up more than others. Understand that by diffusing them they don’t always go away, they will just be weaker.

“My mind doesn’t stop thinking and judging, how can I get it to shut up?”

Your thinking mind doesn’t stop, it is constantly judging, taking in feedback, analysing, criticising, questioning, planning etc. It never stops.

But this isn’t a problem.

Just observe that you are having these thoughts and understand that it’s all part of the process.

Recovery quote

“Remember that everyone has these internal judging thoughts, but we can't hear them, right? When I have bad thoughts about myself, a part of me seems to think the quality of the bad thoughts is visible to other people. But it's not, unless I react to it. If I don't react, it's just a tape-recorder in my mind.”

Nuture your mind

Developing the habit of being gentle, tender and accepting towards all your thoughts no matter how stupid, silly or horrible they are is an extremely powerful way to nuture yourself. It's a great way to learn how to be at peace with yourself and with your mind. Stick with it and eventually you may feel as calm and as centered as a zen monk.

Diffusing Anxiety

A lot of people with bulimia suffer from anxiety and it’s not surprising. Exhaustion, malnutrition, and dehydration can make you sensitive to anxious feelings.

You may feel as though your nerves are shattered, you may feel on edge, restless, and find it difficult to relax.

In this state you are very prone to anxiety.

When I was aged 18 and at college I started to experience periods of serious anxiety that lasted roughly 5 years. It was a total nightmare, I lost all my confidence, self-esteem and became a shadow of my former self. To be honest I thought I was going slowly mad.

It wasn’t until I met my wife Ali that she pointed out that I was having an anxiety attack. I didn’t even know!

It took a long time to fully believe it was just anxiety. For years I had convinced myself I had faulty wiring in my brain (quite similar to how a lot of people with bulimia convince themselves that they are mentally unwell).

Diffusion is the technique I discovered that finally resolved my anxiety once and for all.

The key to overcoming anxiety is to **understand it’s a fear of fear**.

A scary thought or feeling e.g. “bulimia is going to kill me” can trigger off a chemical reaction inside the body which can include anxious feelings.

These anxious feelings can be scary and this leads to more fear.

Our thoughts begin to race, our heart starts to pump faster.

Feelings of anxiety rush through your body.

This increases our sense of loss of control,

Which encourages more fear,

Which encourages further anxiety.

Anxiety is a very powerful and very uncomfortable sensation that we find it difficult to cope. This can send us running towards a binge to calm our fragile nerves.

Anxiety is fear feeding off fear.

The truth is there is nothing to fear. Anxious feelings can not harm you in any way.

If you learn to diffuse any anxious feelings they won't bother you so much and will not cause as much fear. Eventually with practice they won't bother you at all.

I consider myself fully recovered from my anxiety issues even though at times I still feel anxious. It's normal to feel anxious. If I am meeting new people for the first time I can feel a little anxious, but now it doesn't bother me at all. I just notice it, welcome it and give the anxiety a huge mental hug (I have practised this over the years and have become extremely good at rousing up a big load of warmth and love towards any anxiety) and then I just get on with whatever it is I am doing. By doing this, any anxious feelings quickly dissolve and fade away. Even if the anxiety takes some time to fade away, because I have embraced it, it doesn't really bother me.

Whenever you experience any powerful anxious fear thoughts and sensations follow the diffusion steps.

Step 1: Notice you are having anxious feelings

This should be fairly easy to do, as anxious feelings tend to make themselves very obvious. Say to yourself "I am having the feeling of being anxious"

Step 2: Don't argue or fight with anxious feelings

Do not try to outrun, out think or outsmart your anxious feelings.

Step 3: Make peace with the anxiety.

Anxious feelings are very uncomfortable. But instead of reacting with fear, do something completely different and instead warmly welcome them.

By doing this you are standing up towards anxious feelings and saying "I am no longer afraid of you, you don't scare me, in fact I only feel warmth and love towards you."

Love and warmth quickly removes the fear feelings and therefore the anxiety.

If I ever experience any anxious feelings this is what usually goes through my mind:

"Hey!! there you are!! where have you been???, I missed you! Come here and give me a BIG hug you silly sausage!". I usually image my anxiety as me as a small child who is a bit lost and scared. I then give my anxiety a huge warm mental hug. I also imagine a space in my mind opens up and I can put the anxiety in there. "Hey, why don't you sit up here and take it easy. It's okay, I will look after you now, you are safe here and please stay as long as you want!"

Step 4: Move on and focus on something else.

Anxiety will try to claim your attention. Acknowledge that the anxiety is there and it exists and then just focus on whatever it is you were doing before you became anxious.

If the anxious feelings are very strong and you find it difficult to focus on anything, just sit and experience the anxiety while continuing to warmly welcome it and letting it flow through you. In time the anxious feelings will dissipate and then you can move on and focus on something else.

Anxiety is a fear of fear feelings. So instead welcome fear feelings with love and warmth rather than more fear.

[[Panic Away](#) is the program that dramatically changed my life and cured my anxiety. I have since personally met the author Barry McDonagh to thank him. I owe him a lot and if you have any problems with anxiety I strongly recommend his [fantastic program](#)]

Dealing with urges to purge

Many bulimics purge their food as a release from anxious stressful feelings.

Instead we can learn to accept those feelings. Welcome and embrace them and you will notice that they will sit with you much more comfortably.

It can also help to remember purging **does not help** you to lose weight and only makes your bulimia worse.

Again just apply the 4 step diffusion process as outlined.

Step 1: Notice you are feeling an urge to purge

Notice that this urge may include anxious feelings or fear thoughts.

Step 2: Don't argue or fight with urge to purge

Don't be tempted to fight back against the feelings.

Step 3: Make peace with the urge to purge

Accept that the urge is there and there isn't much you can do about it. Yes, you would prefer if you didn't have these sensations, but acknowledge they are here now so there is no point getting more worked up.

Step 4: Move on and focus on something else.

Get on with your day, go for a walk, call a friend or just engage more fully in any activity, perhaps one you were already doing.

In Summary

- If you find yourself moving towards a binge, (the moment you notice your body physically moving) STOP. Stand completely still and realise that your thoughts cannot make you move. They can not make you binge.
- Remember that no matter what your thoughts are telling you, you do NOT want to binge.
- Move to a safe space away from food and follow the 4 step binge diffusion technique.
- The diffusion technique can be used not just for binge urges but also to deal with unwanted thoughts, anxiety and urges to purge. So whenever you experience an unwanted thought, anxious feelings or an urge to purge apply this 4 step technique:
 - Step 1: Notice you are having an unwanted thought/ anxious feeling/ urge to purge
 - Step 2: Don't argue or fight with the unwanted thought/ anxious feeling/ urge to purge
 - Step 3: Make peace with the unwanted thought/ anxious feeling/ urge to purge
 - Step 4: Move on and focus on something else.
- A thought is powerless unless you attach an emotion to it and learning to accept all emotions and thoughts (even if you would rather they didn't exist) is key to your recovery here.
- A lot of people with bulimia suffer from anxiety and the key to overcoming it starts with understanding that anxiety is a fear of fear feelings. So rather than reacting with fear, welcome fear feelings with love and warmth. There is no need to fear them, they cannot harm you in any way.

- When it comes to diffusing urges it is important to find out what works best for you, and also to be patient and persistent even if these steps are not helpful every time.

Stage 3: Intuitive Training

In reality, it's not realistic or healthy for anyone to stay on a strict meal plan forever. Eating cannot (and should not) be that "perfect" and inflexible.

Think of structured eating as training wheels on a bicycle. They help you re-learn what healthy, normal eating is like and once you get the hang of it and you start to find your balance, you can take them off and ride freely.

The challenge is: what do we replace structured eating with?

We can't go back to how we used to eat. Our old eating habits were what got us into trouble in the first place.

We need to say goodbye to diets, rules and restrictions. They will only lead us back to bulimia.

We need a new frame of reference to guide how we eat food.

Let me introduce you to Intuitive Eating.

This is an extremely powerful and simple way to eat food that will enable you to maintain a healthy weight for life without any pain, suffering, rules or plans.

You learn how to stop relying on calories, food plans and food rules to dictate how you should eat and instead you rely on your intuition.

"Intuition" is from the Latin word "intueri" which means to acquire knowledge from within, an inner knowing. This is a very advanced stage of recovery and it is important to have successfully mastered the first two stages before you attempt intuitive eating.

Although you may feel ready to start intuitive eating after just a few months of recovery many of our members find that they are not truly ready to embrace this stage until they have been in successful recovery and using structured eating for 7-12 months (in some cases even a little longer than this).

If you're not quite ready, it's still a good idea to read through this section so you can get a good understanding of what it's all about.

If you are below your most healthy weight range and/or still experiencing disordered eating, your body will not be able to give accurate information about the right amount of food or type of food it needs.

Only do this step when you can say "yes" to all of the following questions:

- Have you used structured eating successfully for a number of months?
- Have you overcome your fear and anxiety of all foods?
- Have you stopped restricting?
- Have you overcome your primal hunger?
- Have you overcome your malnutrition?
- Have you stopped bingeing and purging?
- Have your subtle sensations of hunger and satiety returned?

Eating the way nature intended.

The human species is the pinnacle of evolution, the most intelligent and sophisticated animal in the known universe. Do you think Mother Nature would have overlooked the simple matter of guiding us towards what to eat, how much to eat, and when to eat?

How do you think wild animals and human beings have survived over millions of years?

How did our ancestors survive without supermarkets, diets, nutritionists? Our ancestors didn't know what calories or vitamins even were.

They used their intuition.

Think about someone who doesn't struggle with his or her weight. If you're having trouble thinking of someone like that, think of a baby or a young child.

They just seem to know when, what and how much food they need. When their body needs fuel, they get hungry, triggering an urge to eat. They simply stop eating when their hunger is satisfied, even if there is food left on their plate.

Most of them really enjoy food and seem to be able to eat whatever they want. However they'll turn down even delicious food if they aren't hungry. They're in charge of their choices and they do whatever feels right for them at the time.

This is called "Intuitive Eating"

Intuitive eating is based on the premise that becoming more attuned to the body's natural hunger signals is a more effective way to attain a healthy weight; rather than keeping track of the amounts of energy and fats in foods.

It's a process that is intended to create a healthy relationship with food by paying attention to mind, and body cues. Intuitive Eating, goes by many names, have a look at book titles and you will see: "non-dieting" or "the non-diet approach", "normal eating", "wisdom eating", "conscious eating" and more.

Simply put: **An intuitive eater uses their hunger cues to tell them how much, what to eat and when they should eat.**

If there is one secret to total recovery for life, it is INTUITIVE EATING.

It's the only way to eat that will totally FREE you from all food plans, calorie counting, restriction and deprivation for LIFE!

Losing our natural intuitive way of eating

When you were born, food was just food. You cried when you were hungry and stopped eating when you were full. You never thought about weight issues and you never had a weight problem. You used your internal regulator called "Hunger" to know very clearly when and how much you should eat and you were 100% instinctive when doing so.

Unfortunately this didn't last for long as you grew up in our diet obsessed culture. Like a sponge soaking up water, you began to absorb the diet rules, the faulty thin myths and a fear of fat.

Everywhere you look in our media there are messages about losing weight. In magazines, TV, radio, friends, adverts, shop products. It's like a huge avalanche of weight loss brainwashing over and over and over again.

And it doesn't take long to sink in and do damage.

School children, in one study, showed a stronger aversion to being overweight than to being blind or physically disabled; even children as young as 8 are restricting their food intake and by the age of 15 one in three have been on a diet.

As we grow up we lose touch with our natural sensations of hunger and satiety. We stop asking ourselves “Am I hungry?” and “What am I hungry for”? Instead we rely on time of day, portion size, calorie or fat content of food and even mood to dictate how much we eat.

Western society guides us away from our natural instincts and we quickly forget how to be intuitive eaters.

Your intuition is smarter and more accurate than any diet.

Intuitive eating teaches you to trust your internal cues as to what, when and how much you should eat.

Your body is incredibly complex and many factors can affect your level of hunger such as:

- Exercise and activity,
- What you ate previously,
- A woman’s monthly cycle,
- Genetics,
- Muscle size,
- Metabolism,
- Amount and quality of sleep,
- Alcohol,
- Mood,
- Drugs.

It's madness to think that some expert in a white coat or any diet plan knows exactly how much food YOU as an individual needs. I doubt a diet plan calculates your genetic makeup, your energy expenditure, your metabolic rate, plus your day to day hunger level variations or knows your everyday lifestyle.

If a diet tells us we can only have 1 egg white on 1 slice toast for breakfast, what happens if we eat this but we are still getting cravings for another slice of toast or perhaps a sausage? This answer is that it can lead to a binge!

The only way we can truly know what we need to eat is to listen to our hunger.

Your intuition knows what your body needs better than any diet in the world.

Listening to your intuition helps you to avoid overeating. The No 1 reason for weight gain.

The only time we need to eat is when we feel hunger. But because most of us do not listen to our hunger, we don’t rely on hunger signals to tell us when to eat.

Instead we rely on other factors to decide whether or not we should eat.

Such as:

- Being Bored
- Because the food is there
- Because it looks tasty
- Wanting to numb negative emotions
- Eating more now in-case I am hungry later
- I was taught that I must clear my plate.

And many many more.

All these cues have one major problem. They do not take into account whether or not you are actually hungry!

It's as simple as this.

If you don't listen to your natural signals of hunger and fullness then it becomes **very easy to eat more food than you actually need.**

By far the most common reason for unnecessary weight gain is **CONSTANT OVER EATING.** This is because in our society we are **NEVER** told to listen to our hunger, so it just withers away.

We eat more, simply because we don't realize we are full!

But if we listen to our hunger and satiety we can eat an amount of food that is perfect for us. Even if we eat a little too much, or not enough, at a meal that's perfectly OK. Next time, our hunger levels will naturally adjust to take that into account.

This helps us to avoid overeating and allows us to easily and happily maintain our natural healthy weight.

Sounds too good to be true?

A study on nearly 1300 college women, found that intuitive eaters are more optimistic, have better self-esteem, and a lower body mass index (BMI), without internalizing culture's unrealistically thin ideal.

“But I am scared, intuitive eating feels like I am losing control”

Who has more control?

Example 1: Lucy eats what she wants, when she feels like it, she does not count calories or fat grams, she eats when she is hungry and stops eating when she is full. She is at her natural set point and doesn't worry about her weight.

Example 2: Jenny obsesses about food, she continually counts calories and restricts food intake. Jenny also tries to keep away from 'bad' food yet finds she can't, this leads to binge eating. Afterwards Jenny feels really guilty so purges to regain control. She is constantly obsessed with her weight.

Who has more control?

The answer is obvious.

If we know about nutrition do we need intuition?

Yes. We absolutely need our intuition

After countless diets, counting calories and food obsessions, bulimics tend to know more about nutrition than most people. But just knowing about nutrition isn't good enough.

If nutritional knowledge was all that was needed to be a healthy eater, then bulimics should be some of the most healthy eaters on the planet.

Obviously nutritional knowledge alone does not work.

The problem is that our nutritional knowledge has overtaken our intuitive knowledge.

We put too much focus on nutrition and we ignore **what we really feel like eating.** This teaches us to ignore our internal hunger signals and that doesn't work in the long run.

We need to push away the nutritional guidelines and instead start to **use our intuition**.

If you listen carefully your body will let you know what food it needs and in time you will be amazed at how much more clearly your body begins communicating with you. Your body will let you know exactly what it needs to experience optimal health.

To experience this, simply eat what you want, not what your diet mentality says you should eat.

Diets don't let you think

Diets can be tempting because you don't have to think for yourself.

It takes the pressure off deciding what to eat.

It's the ease of having someone else tell you what to do so you can just do what they say and not "mess anything up."

The problem is, diets lead straight back to bulimia.

We need to start thinking for ourselves and make our own unique choices as to what we really want to eat.

Recovery quote

"YES YES YES. I sometimes STILL have the urge to hop on a diet, (for the security of feeling in control), then I realize I'm not in control - the diet is."

If you find this too challenging

If Intuitive Training starts to feel too difficult then it is important to go back to using structured eating. Despite what you may think this is not a step backwards; acknowledging that you need a little more time to build up that trust in your own intuition is actually a huge step in the right direction.

Recovery Quote

"For me this is the most important part of the program. This is the way we are going to learn to eat going forward for the rest of our lives (ditching the diet mentality, scales, obsession with labels and 'safe' foods).

I am now in a position where I try to experiment with new foods every day, think about how full I am feeling and choose foods I really 'love/feel/want' to eat on a daily basis. Rather than eating what I 'should' eat because it's low fat/low calorie. "

Step 1: Track your hunger

The key component of intuitive eating is to be able to eat when you are hungry and continue to eat until you are satisfied.

It sounds so simple but most of us don't do it.

In order to do this we need to fully embrace and trust our hunger.

Due to bulimia our hunger tends to be erratic, powerful and confusing but for us to recover, it's very important that we get back in touch with our subtle hunger sensations. The sooner we start to tune into our hunger sensations the faster they will return.

Before we can fully trust our hunger, we really need to start becoming aware of it, and getting comfortable with it.

Like reconnecting with a long lost friend.

We need to explore and learn as much as we can about our own personal hunger.

The more we pay attention to our hunger the stronger it becomes. In time once your hunger signals have fully returned you can then use them to decide what, when and how much you should eat.

What you need to do

Step 1: Ask yourself: “How hungry am I and what does it feel like?”

Throughout the the day I want you to mentally tune into your hunger and ask yourself one simple question?

“How hungry am I and what does it feel like?”

This literally only takes a few seconds to do, so please try to do this at least 10 times throughout each day.

It can be helpful to set your phone or watch to beep on the hour. When you hear the beep just take a few seconds to tune in and assess your hunger.

This will help you explore, learn and understand hunger sensations and feelings within your body.

Step 2: Rate your hunger level using the Hunger Scale

A great way to relearn hunger and satiety signals is to start to use the Hunger Scale below to rate your hunger levels throughout the day.

1. Physically faint.
2. Ravenous.
3. Fairly hungry.
4. Slightly hungry.
5. Neutral.
6. Pleasantly satisfied.
7. Full.
8. Over full.
9. Bloating.
10. Nauseous.

Each time you check-in, ask your self “How hungry am I and what does it feel like?” Then rate your hunger level on the Hunger Scale. This will help you understand, and feel more comfortable with, your natural hunger fluctuations throughout the day.

What to look out for

Everyone is unique and no two people will experience hunger the exact same way. In general though, you can expect to experience at least a few of the signs below:

Physical signs of hunger

- Growling stomach
- Light headedness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Uncomfortable feeling in the stomach
- Irritable
- Headache
- Empty insecure feeling
- Hollow feeling in stomach
- Nausea
- Shaky.

“How long do I need to do this?”

For as long as you wish.

As this literally only takes a few seconds to do, there is no harm in continuing to develop this awareness. It's a great habit to have, and will really help you understand and trust your body.

Recovery Quote

“I started studying my own body. I stopped seeing it as the enemy that just wouldn't listen to me. I realized my problem was not my body but my lack of understanding how to operate it. From that moment on, I started listening to my body very closely. I also stopped trying to push it around and force it to do something against its will. Instead, I became its student, and as a result, I started learning from my body.”

In Summary

- By asking yourself, "How hungry am I and what does it feel like?" multiple times throughout the day you will begin to reconnect with your hunger.
- Use the hunger scale to rate your hunger levels to help yourself understand your natural hunger fluctuations.
- Remember to look out for the physical signs of hunger throughout the day too.

Step 2: Eat what you feel like for one meal a day

In this step you are going to practise using your intuition to choose what you would like to eat.

The real key to this stage is for you to eat what you FEEL like and not what you think you should eat.

What you need to do

Choose one meal a day to begin with. This can be any meal or any snack it doesn't matter which. For this meal don't plan what you are going to eat.

Instead when the meal time approaches wrap your hands around your stomach and close your eyes for a moment and then ask yourself :

“What do I FEEL like eating?”

Spend a few moments here.

Give your intuition a little time to answer the question.

Try to get a picture in your mind or imagine the taste of the food you are hungry for.

Once you see the food you can also ask yourself

Do I “feel” like eating this food?

or

Will this food satisfy me right now?

If the answer is “yes” then go ahead! Prepare and eat that food.

Remember no food is off limits. You need to eat what your body wants, not what your diet mentality says you should eat.

If the answer is “no” then visualise a few different foods until you find one that feels right.

With practice you will be able to identify specific foods that will satisfy true physical hunger.

It’s important you ask yourself “what do I FEEL like eating?”

It’s important you ask “what do I FEEL like eating?” and not “what do I WANT to eat”.

These are two different questions and they can have two very different answers.

By asking “what do I FEEL like?” you ensure you are eating a food that your body really wants. If you ask yourself “what do I WANT to eat?” you might bypass your intuition and instead choose a food based on how healthy you think it is.

“What if I don’t have the food that I am craving”

At times the food that you are craving will not be accessible.

In this case visualise another food that will satisfy your needs.

If you are not able to visualise another food then have something that closely resembles what you are craving.

The more accurately you can satisfy your body’s needs, the more satisfied you will be after your meal, thus reducing the tendency to overeat

If you find you continually crave a specific food, then it makes sense to have that food readily available.

“What if I don’t know what I feel like eating?”

This is very normal.

Even with experienced intuitive eaters, there are lots of times when their intuition does not indicate a clear preference as to what their body wants to eat.

At these times, when you don't know what you ‘feel’ like eating, it is best to choose an “all the time” food rather than a “sometimes” food.

Also, remember that in order to identify what you really want to eat you need to be hungry in the

first place. Keep in mind if you are famished your body will likely crave energy dense foods that will be quickly converted into energy.

Don't fool yourself into believing that you don't want something when you really do!

It's important not to deny yourself the food that you really want.

It's OK to crave a "sometimes" food.

It might be 8am in the morning and you are craving doughnuts for breakfast.

If you have a thought such as, "I don't need that doughnut," consider the possibility that by eating the doughnut you will be satisfied and not haunted by a craving. For example, how many times have you opted for the salad, when you really wanted the cheesy lasagna?

Make sure you let yourself eat what you FEEL like eating.

Are cake and ice cream calling to you? Go for it!

Fancy a bit of pasta? As long as you're actually hungry and feeling like it... then go for it!

Think about it. As soon as you tell yourself not to eat a certain food, you upset the natural balance in your relationship with it, so rather than wanting it less, that "forbidden food" becomes more attractive.

From this day forward, nothing is off-limits to you.

"What if I just want to eat chocolate all the time"?

This is SUCH a common misconception.

In fact the exact opposite happens.

Just because you may have felt like eating chocolate all day long before recovery doesn't mean that it will happen now.

Thanks to structured eating you are no longer a slave to primal hunger, your body is no longer crying out for sustenance and your sugar taste response has normalized.

Letting yourself enjoy the food you really want will actually result in 'self-limiting' rather than out of control eating – deprivation is the key factor that leads to backlash eating.

Food habituation research shows that the more a person is exposed and allowed to eat a food, the less desirable it becomes to them over time.

Food habituation has been demonstrated in many species (including humans) and with many foods, including: pizza, chocolate and potato chips.

If you can have something anytime you want it stops being so special.

If a kid can play with any toy except a blue truck, have a guess as to which what toy he will want to play with?

But if the kid plays with the blue truck every day he won't find it as special.

If you can have it whenever you want it, eventually chocolate cake will become as exciting as an apple.

If you find yourself struggling with this step, or want to eat chocolate cake all the time, then it is important to assess whether you have started intuitive training too early.

“But I want to eat healthy foods!”

Health recommendations are not meant to be taken to extreme. "Eat more of this and less of that" does not mean "Eat only this and none of that."

If someone has rigid rules for so-called “healthy eating”, he or she is more likely to succumb to overeating as a consequence of their well-meaning rules.

We also need to recognise that in society concept of what is healthy is often misguided. It’s not healthy to just eat salads and vegetables; it’s not healthy to only eat low-fat foods; it’s not healthy to avoid eating carbohydrates. Yet some people will boast of their new healthy diet, oblivious to the fact that they are both dangerous and restrictive.

Lots of people determine the healthiness of food based on its calorie content alone but doing so can mean you’re missing out on essential nutrition, which in turn plays havoc with your intuition.

Many “healthy” foods are so low in calories and nutrition that you’ll find it almost impossible to satisfy your appetite no matter how much you eat. You can fill your stomach with them but your body will still be crying out for more!

So when you look at it this way, eating too healthily can be unhealthy.

To be perfectly healthy you DO NOT need to eat perfectly.

You need a varied diet. You need to start to choose foods that you actually want to eat, not basing food choices on how healthy you believe something is.

Of course if you find yourself wanting to eat lots of very healthy foods like fruits and vegetables then that’s okay too, but if you find that they are all you want to eat then you need to:

1. Understand that while those foods have many health benefits, eating them alone is not healthy eating.
2. Ask yourself if there are underlying motivations for those choices.
3. Consider whether you’ve taken on intuitive eating too early.

The healthiness of your food intake is best assessed by looking at the overall picture. It is about balance, variety and developing a non-restrictive, non-judgemental eating attitude.

Ultimately, it’s okay to want to eat healthy, as long as you truly understand what it means.

"What are the dangers of just eating very healthy foods during recovery?"

Recovery is all about truly freeing yourself from food rules and fears. When you put exclusive emphasis on eating only very healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, you can never truly remove those damaging food rules.

In fact while you are recovering, if you focus on eating healthy foods too much, you are in danger of developing a whole new range of potentially damaging food rules. So rather than aiming for only healthy food you should aim for balance.

You may or may not have heard about the lesser known eating disorder Orthorexia. It is an unhealthy obsession with health and “pure” food where a person restricts their eating to only specific “health” foods. It might not sound so bad but extreme cases of Orthorexia have resulted in death.

Recovery quote

“I’ve struggled with both Bulimia and Orthorexia. My Orthorexia definitely stemmed from reading too many articles written by supposedly nutrition experts and health food blogs. Bottom line, any

lifestyle that gives food ambiguous adjectives such as "good/ bad," "healthy/ dangerous" is ED prone. I think this is a major issue because there is a grave danger that many people trying to recover might trade their bulimia for Orthorexia and consider themselves recovered, which could not be further from the truth."

Recovery quote

"There is so much online about raw food diets etc...that have been really counter-productive to my recovery. I would think I was doing the right thing but really I was depriving my body in a whole different way."

"So if I feel like eating a Cheesecake, are you saying I should eat cheesecake?"

Simply put... yes.

If you have got a craving for cheesecake, then no substitutes will do, it's got to be cheesecake.

But take note, the low-fat, low sugar options might fool you for a moment, but they cannot fool your body.

"What if I ignore my cravings?"

Realize that cravings are nothing to be afraid of. They are your body's way of telling you what it needs and honouring them will further strengthen your intuition. If you ignore your cravings or try to fool your body by eating substitutes then your cravings will only become stronger which could lead to overeating and bingeing.

"But I feel guilty eating certain foods"

Just keep telling yourself...

"You don't have to feel guilty about eating foods ever again".

"But, I am only craving energy dense foods!"

Please rest assured that even if you're craving a lot of cheesecake right now, it won't be long before your body tells you it wants other things like fruits, vegetables, pasta, meat and wholefoods. The more you press on with intuitive eating the more you'll find you want to eat in a really balanced way.

"This sounds scary!"

Most people feel like this to begin with because in a way once we get used to structured eating it can start to act as a safety net. But don't worry, remember you are going to start off slowly and gradually build up your confidence with intuitive eating. To begin with all you need to do is use your intuition to guide you through one meal (or snack) a day.

In summary

- Eat what you feel like for one meal a day.

- Remember to ask yourself "what do I feel like eating" not "what do I want to eat."
- Honour your cravings by eating the foods that your body tells you it wants.
- Understand that letting yourself enjoy the foods you really want will lead to self-limiting behaviours.
- It's okay to want to eat healthy foods as long as you have a healthy, non-restrictive eating attitude.

Step 3: Create a 30 minute “hunger window” around your snack times

This is an optional step for those who require a little more support moving from structured eating to intuitive eating. Its not necessary, but you may find it useful.

This step will help you build a little more confidence and trust with your hunger signals. To do this we are simply going to add a little flexibility to the rigid structured eating schedule. It would be foolish to completely remove the support provided by your structured eating plan straight away. So instead to begin with we are going to use a combination of intuition and structured eating.

What you need to do

To start off with, instead of eating exactly by the clock, I want you to add a 30 minute “Hunger Window” before and after your preset snack times.

Within this 1 hour window you can use your hunger to decide when to eat.

So for example, if your preset structured eating snack time was 2pm, then your new hunger window means you can eat that snack at any point between 1:30pm and 2:30 pm. Let your hunger decide when to eat your snack.

If you are hungry 30 minutes before your snack time then eat your food then. If you are not hungry at your preset snack time it's OK to wait up to 30 minutes for your hunger to appear before eating your snack.

If you find you are still not hungry 30 minutes after your preset snack time I would encourage you to eat your food anyway. It takes time to be able to trust your intuitive hunger.

Allowing the time in-between meals and snacks to vary slightly is perfectly fine. This will help you to start tuning into those natural hunger signals.

Why snacks instead of meals?

For a lot of us it can be difficult to adjust our meal times. Breakfast is usually at the same time every morning, if we go to work or school usually we cannot dictate what time we have lunch at. If we eat with our family for dinner then it can be difficult to adjust the dinner time.

Snacks are usually a lot less structured and offer us much greater freedom to choose when to eat. This gives us a chance to really practise tapping into our intuition and hunger.

Eat once you feel subtle sensations of hunger

Don't WAIT until you are very hungry. We are just looking for the subtle sensations of hunger, a slight rumble in your stomach, or perhaps you notice you are starting to think about food a little. If

you feel the subtle sensations of hunger then you know it's OK to eat.

Don't fool yourself into thinking you are not hungry when you are.

Because you are re-learning hunger sensations, it can be easy to play mind games with yourself. You need to be careful not to dismiss real hunger and not to think you are full when you are not really or else you will still be deprived.

Do not ignore the subtle sensations. This is your body's way of telling you it would like some food.

If you are eating 6 small meals rather than 3 meal and 3 snacks.

If you are eating 6 meals rather than 3 meals and 3 snacks just apply this technique to every other meal through out the day.

I would suggest not doing this for breakfast as there can be little time for flexibility in the morning.

A possible pattern would be:

Meal 1: Follow your structured eating plan

Meal 2: Use your hunger window

Meal 3: Follow your structured eating plan

Meal 4: Use your hunger window

Meal 5: Follow your structured eating plan

Meal 6: Use your hunger window

Use the Hunger Scale

The Hunger Scale is an extremely useful tool for this. As a general rule, eat when you notice yourself between numbers 3 and 4 in the Hunger Scale (between Fairly hungry - Slightly hungry).

Remember hunger is the most powerful binge trigger there is, so don't let yourself get down to numbers 1 or 2 or you may trigger a binge!

Stay aware and keep an eye on your hunger

It's easy to get so busy that we ignore our body's signals that are telling us to eat! Don't forget to keep track of your hunger sensations throughout the day.

"I don't feel any hunger!"

Don't worry if you don't feel the subtle sensations just now. You should still eat your snack, even if you get to the end of your hunger window without experiencing hunger. In time the subtle sensations of hunger will return.

In summary

- Add some flexibility to your eating schedule by creating a 30 minute hunger window before and after each of your preset snack times.
- Then use this hunger window to decide when to eat within that new time frame.
- If you get to the end of your hunger window and you're still not hungry it's better to eat anyway.
- Remember to eat when you feel the subtle sensations, there is no need to wait until you are ravenous.
- Stay connected to your hunger through the day by using the hunger scale
- Don't panic if you don't feel any hunger at all right now, it will take time to reconnect fully with these sensations.

Step 4: Eat until you feel satisfied and then stop eating

Hunger fluctuates all the time as it constantly adjusts to meet your body's needs. Your body is incredibly complex and many factors can affect your hunger such as your activity levels, what you have eaten previously, your metabolism, whether you got enough sleep last night, etc.

It's perfectly normal to be only slightly hungry one day and incredibly hungry the next. At times there is no obvious reason for hunger to fluctuate from day to day.

This also means that because we are more hungry we are going to have to eat more food to feel satisfied.

For many bulimics, who have not learned to trust their hunger, this can be scary.

They can get anxious about their hunger changes; they associate feeling hungry as a binge urge. They may think they are OUT OF CONTROL, when really they are JUST HUNGRY.

We must learn to trust our hunger and try to remove the self-imposed limits we place on ourselves that tell us how much we can eat.

What you need to do for this step

Choose one meal a day to practise listening to your satiety.

$\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through your meal or as soon as you notice any feelings of satiety pause for a moment.

During this pause:

Put your hand on your stomach and try and feel the sensations of filling up.

Ask yourself **“Am I truly satisfied, or do I need to eat more food?”**

If you feel like you are truly satisfied then stop eating. Put your knife and fork down and walk away from the table.

If you are not satisfied, then imagine the feeling of being comfortably full in your stomach. This isn't over full, this is just the right amount of food that feels good, not too heavy, not too light.

Decide how much more food you think will be required to make you feel truly satisfied and then eat that amount.

Once you have eaten that amount pause again and ask yourself: “Am I truly satisfied, or do I need to eat more food?”

“How do I know if I am feeling satisfied?”

Satisfying your hunger means that you are no longer hungry, you have eaten the right amount of food to fill your stomach and take away any feelings of hunger. You feel light and energetic and ready for your next activity.

If you're mindful, you'll notice that as you become full, the flavor of the food goes from fabulous to just OK and it gets harder to give food and eating your full attention.

Other signs to look out for include:

- A comfortable drop in your stomach
- You may let out a satisfaction sigh
- A comfortable content, warm feeling in your stomach
- An urge that tells you that you have had enough to eat
- A gentle, clear, satisfied sensation in the solar plexus (the area below your rib cage but above your stomach)
- Feelings of being content
- Not feeling hungry anymore
- No more food thoughts and no more hunger signals.

It is ESSENTIAL that you eat slowly and pay attention during the meal or you could easily miss any feelings of satisfaction. Remember it can take up to 20 minutes for any feelings of fullness to register so please take your time during your meal.

Do not confuse hunger with binge urges!

When my wife Ali was in recovery she would constantly say, “You know, eating this amount of food before would have classified as a binge, but now I know it’s just hunger!”

Very often she would say this after coming back from a session at the local gym. She knew the workout would make her more hungry than normal and she trusted that her body knew best. She made sure to remove the limitations on how much she could acceptably eat in order to satisfy her true hunger. She knew it wasn’t a binge urge, she was just more hungry than normal.

Understand that at times you will feel more hungry than others and this is normal.

If you feel more hungry, then it’s perfectly OK to eat more food. This is NOT a binge urge and eating more food to satisfy your hunger is not a binge.

If you feel excessively hungry, don’t panic, you may find a perfectly rational reason for it. Perhaps you have been slightly under eating over the past few days, or perhaps you have been more active or if you’re female perhaps you are in the last week of your menstrual cycle.

Even if there is no obvious reason you should still trust that your body knows best.

It can help to track your hunger throughout the day as this will help you learn to understand and trust your natural hunger fluctuations.

The Menstrual cycle

If you’re a woman then you may experience an upsurge in binge urges and cravings for sugary, energy dense foods in the days leading up to your period.

However, as scary as this can be, research shows that there is a very straightforward explanation – your body simply needs the extra fuel at this time.

Obviously we tend to equate cravings for energy dense foods with bulimia, but again this is your body's way of telling you it needs more food.

Try allowing yourself an extra snack or slightly more food at meal times during the lead up to menstruation and know that it is okay to eat the foods you are craving. Also please understand that there is no need to fear eating more at this time because you'll also experience a **small rise in metabolism** that compensates for the additional food you have eaten.

“How can I track my satiety levels?”

Use the hunger scale to keep track of how full you are. Staying between numbers 6 & 7 (Pleasantly satisfied & Full) will help you feel comfortable after eating.

“What if I think I just eat too much?”

Firstly do not panic. This is very normal, so please do not worry. Intuitive eating is a skill and takes a lot of practice.

If you feel you have eaten too much, then make sure to stop eating and walk away from the table.

Do not feel guilty about eating the extra food. Understand that if you overeat on one meal your body will naturally self-correct and you will not feel so hungry at the next meal.

“How long does this take?”

Although everyone is different, as a general guideline you should expect it to take 3-5 months before you feel fully confident eating in this way. That may seem like a long time right now, but remember, this is the **final hurdle on your journey to ultimate freedom!**

“What if I am still not full and I have finished my meal?”

If you have been paying attention and eating slowly but are still hungry, it is obvious your body needs more food. It's OK to eat more food if this happens.

If the thought of eating more food makes you feel a little anxious, then feel free to wait 10 minutes. Sometimes it can take a little longer for feelings of fullness to register. If after 10 minutes you are still hungry then you know it is REAL hunger and you can eat.

“What should I do with the left over food?”

As soon as you know you have eaten enough throw away the rest of your food. Doing this will help you to avoid overeating which can lead you to binge. Dispose of your left over food in a way that ensures it is impossible to retrieve it. Some people feel uncomfortable with the idea of throwing away food but it is vital to safeguard your recovery in this way.

In some cases (when you can trust yourself more) you can freeze the food, if it is something that you want to keep for another day.

Recovery quote

“I agree. Something that was powerful for me was getting rid of the leftovers from meals as soon as my family was through eating. I couldn't have the extra food staring at me and it was empowering to throw it away or down the disposal and think there is another victory for today. I would say aloud to myself, "I am sorry for throwing out this good food, but it's necessary for

now."

"I feel guilty for eating more food"

Do NOT feel guilty. As long as you are paying attention, and eating slowly, then you know that it is TRUE hunger. This is a TRUE need. Your body NEEDS this food. You never have to feel guilty for giving your body what it needs.

Do you feel guilty for giving your body air?

Do you feel guilty for giving your body water?

Of course not, so don't feel guilty for giving your body the food it needs.

"But I still feel guilty"

If you are still feeling guilty just realize that this is a fear thought. Use the Diffusion exercise from stage 2 to remove any power from the thought.

"But I still feel anxious eating that amount of food"

If you think finishing the plate of food may cause you too much anxiety and you are unable to diffuse the fear thoughts, simply stop when you feel like doing so. It's much better to stop eating rather than risk purging your food.

In time as your confidence grows you will start to trust your hunger more.

"What if I don't feel sensations of fullness?"

It can take time for your feelings of fullness to return. Most people reconnect with feelings of hunger a lot sooner than they reconnect with sensations of fullness, so give it time.

If you don't feel any sensation of fullness, then stick to your allocated portions from your structured eating plan for now. In time the sensations will return.

"I am hungry shortly after my meals"

If you find you are getting hungry shortly after your meals, then you may need to reassess if you really were truly satisfied in the first place. Try increasing the portion size of your main meals. Also make sure you are eating a balanced meal and are getting enough protein.

Be very careful of mind games

Do not fool yourself into thinking you are satisfied with your meal when you are not. This is another form of restrictive eating and will lead you straight back to bingeing and purging.

"I find this too challenging!"

Spotting the signs of fullness is challenging and takes practice. There will be times when you eat too much and times when you will eat too little and this is PERFECTLY OK.

The amazing thing about tracking your hunger is that if you eat too much then the next time you

won't feel as hungry and if you eat too little the next time you will feel more hungry. So it all balances out nicely.

With more practice and as you begin to understand your body better you can confidently and accurately assess your hunger levels during a meal.

Recovery quote

"Today I had a bran muffin and a small piece of chicken for lunch and was left feeling very unsatisfied. I tried chewing gum, drinking water, and going for a walk, but the urge to eat still remained. I started thinking about going out and getting a pizza to binge on. The second those thoughts crept into my head, I forced myself to turn inward and ask myself what I was feeling. And honestly, the answer that came back was "hungry." So I grabbed a frozen pizza slice I had in the freezer and ate that, and I stopped there!"

In Summary

- We must NOT PANIC if we are hungry and we must accept that hunger fluctuations are normal and trust that our body knows best.
- It's perfectly normal to feel only slightly hungry one day and then very hungry the next.
- Finding ourselves very hungry does not mean we're destined to binge, it simply means that our bodies need more food at that time.
- To build up your confidence, start slowly. Choose one meal a day and practice listening to your satiety by asking yourself, "am I truly satisfied or do I need to eat more food?"
- Track your satiety levels by using the hunger scale and try not to panic if you find yourself eating too much. There is no need to feel guilty about eating more than usual, your body will naturally self correct by telling you to eat less at your next meal.
- The transition to fully intuitive eating may take a lot longer than you'd like but please don't be disheartened, this is your final step to ultimate freedom, it will be worth the hard work!

Step 5: Go intuitive

If you have followed the first four steps at this stage you should be:

1. Tracking your hunger levels throughout the day.
2. Eating what you FEEL like for at least one meal.
3. Eating your snacks within your 30 minute "hunger window"
4. Eating until you FEEL satisfied for at least one meal.

At this stage we are not really intuitive eating, nor are we following structured eating. I guess at this stage we are following a combination of the two principles. Gradually and slowly we want to move towards a more intuitive lifestyle.

This is the final step to becoming an intuitive eater and will provide the framework for how you eat from now on.

What you need to do for this step

Gradually let all your food rules and recovery steps dissolve away and instead follow these 3 simple rules:

1. Eat what you feel like eating

2. Eat when you are hungry
3. Pay attention and stop when you are full.

That's it. These are the three simple golden rules to living life as a intuitive eater.

“Am I ready to do this?”

Only you will know the answer. Perhaps you prefer to hold on to structured eating a little longer. There is NO RUSH, only do this step once you feel ready. It's perfectly okay to take your time and stay between structured eating and intuitive eating for a few months.

Pushing the boundaries

For most of you the transition to an intuitive eater will require a lot of back and forth - a lot of testing out what works best for you. Some of you will want to dive right in and go fully intuitive while others who are more cautious are going to go back and forth between structured eating and intuitive eating. Both approaches are perfectly fine, again find what works best for you.

If this feels like too much at once perhaps you can try to eat intuitively for just one day at a time.

Perhaps you can try to increase the “30 minute hunger window” to 45 minutes, or to 60 minutes.

Perhaps you can just focus on eating until you feel satisfied and worry about the rest later.

There is no need to dive into the deep end, and there is no right or wrong way to begin the transition to fully intuitive eating. Let your intuition guide you towards the best way to move forward.

Have a meal plan ready to fall back on if required.

For a little confidence boost it can be useful to have a structured eating meal plan to fall back on. If you are feeling stressed, or if this feels like too much of a challenge it's perfectly fine to go back to your structured eating plan until you feel ready to try eating intuitively again.

“Should I eat 100% intuitively?”

We are not striving for perfection here because there is no such thing, so it can be difficult to say eat all your meals 100% intuitively.

As a guideline I would suggest eating most of your meals according to your intuition and not stressing if every now and then you find yourself eating something when you are not hungry.

It's completely normal to have times when you eat when you are not hungry; family gatherings, ice cream at the beach, popcorn at the cinema etc. This is a natural part of normal healthy eating, it is totally acceptable and should not be feared.

Of course some intuitive eaters do prefer to eat 100% intuitively all of the time, and that's okay too. As your intuition gets stronger you will find that eating food when you are not hungry isn't very enjoyable.

Both approaches are perfectly fine, there is no right or wrong way to do this. Listen to your intuition and find out what approach works best for you.

Recovery quote

“My friend actually laughed at me for turning down ice-cream on a hot day last year because I

wasn't hungry, but I wasn't, so had no urge whatsoever to eat it. To me it's like sleeping when you're not tired, no "intuitive sleeper" would do that because they'd have absolutely no desire to do so"

Intuitive Training Summary

- Remind yourself constantly that NO food will make you fat, as long as it is eaten in moderation. Moderation means eating when you are hungry and stopping before you are uncomfortably full.
- Don't feel obligated to clean your plate by eating every crumb.
- Treat hunger as a friend, not an enemy and learn to use it as a guide to what, when and how much you should eat
- Pause in the middle of a meal or snack. Ask yourself are you still hungry?
- Eat slowly and pay attention.
- It's not about worrying about what you should and shouldn't have... It's about eating what your body FEELS like.
 - The three rules to intuitive eating are:
 - 1. Eat what you feel like eating
 - 2. Eat when you are hungry
 - 3. Stop when you are full.
- Take this as slowly as you'd like. It is going to feel a little challenging at first.
- If you're not ready to dive straight in try extending your hunger window or alternating between days of intuitive eating and days of structured eating. There is no right or wrong here and no specific steps.
- It is time to discover what works best for YOU!
- As an intuitive eater there may be times where you eat for reasons other than hunger. On the flip side you may never do this. Both approaches are perfectly fine, as long as you're listening to your intuition you can't go wrong.

Step 6: Learning to live without bulimia

Bulimia takes up a lot of time, focus and energy.

Once you remove bulimia from your life you will find that you have:

1. A lot more free time
2. A higher attention span and ability to concentrate on things
3. So much more energy and a new zest for life.

This is great news because we generally need more time, energy and attention to get the most out of life.

But if you are not used to all of this freedom you may be wondering, "what do I do now?"

Learning to live without bulimia can be scary at first because most of us have forgotten who we are without it. We've dedicated so much of our time and energies to bulimia that in the process, we've forgotten about the things we truly enjoy in life.

But now bulimia is out of the picture it's time to start reawakening those lost dreams and aspirations. It's time to start a brand new life!

I would suggest giving yourself a small project which will give you something to focus on for the next 6 months or so. Something that you'll really enjoy and that will get the ball rolling in your

new life.

What you need to do for this step

1. Set yourself a 6 month goal

Choose something you would like to do, achieve, create and experience over the next six months.

Some examples of a few 6 months goals include:

1. Learn an instrument (I can fully recommend the guitar)
2. Get off Facebook and rebuild relationships with lost friends in real life
4. Organise your photo collection
5. Organise your dream holiday
6. Go to yoga class for six months (I'm a big Bikram Yoga fan)
7. Get artistic and start to paint, draw and sculpt
8. Did you have any hobbies before bulimia? Can you reignite those?
9. Start to learn the basics of a new language
10. Help support others in bulimia recovery
11. Help others in the community
12. Decorate a room in your house
13. Update your wardrobe and buy clothes that make you feel comfortable.
14. Throw out ALL bulimia related paraphernalia.

2. Start doing it

Implement the new goal into your life.

3. Avoid aiming for perfection

No matter what goal you choose, remember this is not about aiming for “perfection”.

Of course we all want to do our best when striving to reach a goal, but it's important to accept our limitations and push forward in realistic steps. Focus on healthy striving rather than perfectionism.

Some tips for goal choosing

- Avoid any goal that will take longer than 6 months to achieve or that can feel like too big of a challenge.
- Try to find something that is special for you.
- Pick something that is going to make you feel good and proud of yourself
- Avoid anything competitive or that adds any unnecessary stress.
- Any activity that gets you out of the house and interacting with the world is recommended.
- Studies show a brand new experience will increase your happiness more, so try to choose a goal that will expand your life experience.

Recovery quote

“It can be so exciting when you realise how much free time you have but also a little overwhelming if you've lost contact with friends or given up hobbies. I ended up taking up yoga and a Masters degree and found such an amazing passion for life again. But I would caution against taking on too much though! During critical deadlines while completing my Masters I did fall back into binging a little as a crutch.”

Extra: What to expect in recovery

A Recovery Time Line

Due to the individual nature of recovery it is very difficult to detail an exact sequence of events that you're likely to experience, but this timeline should give you a rough idea of what to expect, and when to expect it.

I should emphasis that everyones recovery is different and there is no need to worry if your recovery path is completely different. There is no right or wrong way to recover, just follow your own path.

What to expect at the start of your recovery (Week 1)

The first week of your recovery is likely to feel incredibly overwhelming. With so much to take in you may find yourself feeling exhausted and continually questioning your ability to recover. You may notice an increase in negative thoughts and all emotions will feel amplified.

Some people experience a phase of increased binge urges, but this is nothing to worry about. You have to remember that it's natural for you, as a bulimic, to want to turn back to bulimia when feeling emotionally challenged.

On the plus side, you will no longer feel crazy, lost or alone. You can expect to have a lot of “light bulb moments” as you begin understanding the recovery process, you'll feel a huge sense of relief when connecting with others in recovery and you'll quickly become amazed by your own strength and resilience.

Weeks 2-3

You will likely experience bloating as your body re-hydrates and your digestive system begins processing food properly again (bloating is especially noticeable around your stomach and parotid glands). Weight fluctuations occur.

Urges to binge and purge remain and may even increase, but despite this, you feel so much more committed to recovery. You're inspired to overcome your bulimia more than ever.

You most likely feel worn-out and have little energy because recovery demands so much of you. You continue to experience rapidly changing moods, feeling on top of the world one moment, and completely depressed the next.

You experience your first fully successful days of structured eating, and even though you switch between feeling too hungry to overly full, you're incredibly impressed with your ability to eat normally without turning back to bulimic behaviours.

Despite your best efforts to implement regular eating, episodes of bingeing and purging may

continue.

Your “bulimic-logic” is at its worst and you find all or nothing ways of thinking are dominating your thought processes. You still see slipping up as failing.

You feel surprised and relieved by the amount of things you have in common with others in recovery and begin to seek comfort from the successes of others.

Weeks 3-5

At this time recovery feels scary, exciting and very up and down. Strong urges to binge and purge are still felt most days, especially in the evenings.

Structured eating is still a big challenge and requires all of your attention. You can feel as though you’re obsessing over food more than ever and you still have an inability to distinguish true hunger from emotional hunger.

You’re likely to have utilised some basic recovery strategies at this stage, finding them helpful some of the time.

You experience flashes of mental clarity and for the first time you trust that the momentary relief bingeing and purging may bring is just not worth the long term damage and upset remaining bulimic will cause.

You continue to worry about excessive weight gain and find yourself feeling paranoid that the things you’re experiencing are “not normal.”

You still feel hopeless, lost, afraid and lack trust in recovery a lot of the time, but in deep contrast you occasionally feel hopeful, inspired, courageous and trust in the recovery process.

1-2 Months

Initial bloating has subsided giving you a big boost of confidence and a restored faith in recovery.

As your body begins to get all the nutrients it needs, your skin becomes more radiant, your eyes get brighter and your hair and nails become stronger.

You’re able to appreciate the benefits of structured eating, but still worry that you’re eating too much food. You may find it impossible to eat certain “trigger foods” without completely losing control.

You worry that you’ll never make peace with your body but you do find it easier to avoid obsessive checking behaviours.

2-3 Months

Your weight has become more stable but you’re still prone to small fluctuations for the next couple of months.

You’ve developed a brand new awareness and understand when binge urges are likely to strike.

You’re able to use several recovery strategies effectively in order to postpone or avoid bingeing all together.

Eating is still hard work at times but has definitely become less of a battle. You’re able to tell the difference between real hunger cues and emotional hunger most of the time and you now trust the process of structured eating.

Expect your relationships and social life to take an upturn around this time.

You can experience dreams of relapse at this point in recovery. Although scary, this is actually a positive sign that you're ready to accept change on a subconscious level.

3-4 Months

You almost always feel true hunger at this point, and you've finally started to experience comfortable fullness after meals. You're able to eat many different types of foods (including previously triggering foods) without worrying about weight gain or loss of control.

Frustratingly slow progress in developing additional coping skills coupled with negative body image makes you question your ability to recover.

On the other hand, you're able to think with true clarity and no longer experience the trance-like states that often accompany bulimic thoughts and behaviours.

You have a new found appreciation for the smaller things in life and your "good days" tend to completely outnumber your "bad days."

4-5 Months

You feel the process of recovery is relentless and long to take a "break" from it but at the same time you experience a brand new sense of pride based on your progress so far.

You've finally started to grasp that recovery is a process, that it's normal to take two steps forward and one step back and that it's okay to feel weak.

Worries about who you truly are without bulimia begin to surface causing additional confusion and anxiety.

After 6 Months of recovery

Binge urges tend to be minimal or even non-existent at this stage which offers a much needed escape from detailed planning and strategizing.

Expect to have successfully reintroduced many or all "banned foods," and to have discovered that no food is off limits to you anymore.

You feel like celebrating your successes (and you should) and you're even inclined to talk more openly with your loved ones.

But at this time you're also prone to complacency with your recovery, believing that you no longer need to work hard to stay on track. Letting your guard down too much can lead to relapse.

With no binge urges expect to experience an increased desire to restrict your food in an effort to lose weight. When acting on thoughts of restriction expect almost immediate loss of control, re-emergence of bulimic urges and weight gain (yes, even a little restriction can shock your body back into a state of distressed hunger).

You still struggle with understanding your true identity. You may feel shame or guilt as you mourn the loss of your eating disorder and you'll feel great disappointment that you haven't fully recovered.

Expect to have days where you feel like you've fully recovered, only to experience bumps in the road the following day.

7-8 Months

You're now completely confident in your ability to overcome relapses and you know that bulimia no longer numbs your feelings or offers the emotional escape that it once did.

You've reached your set point weight, you're comfortable around food most of the time and find yourself making more intuitive decisions.

You still rely on forward planning and strategies to make it through more challenging days and situations.

You no longer feel the urge to rush through recovery and you'll likely find yourself fully accepting of the time it takes to recover.

Your moods are stable, you feel alive and you notice a new sense of self-confidence and body acceptance developing.

9 Months

At this stage recovery doesn't seem so bad after all. You've learned the value of gradual change and you've managed to truly let go of your fear of relapse.

You still experience thoughts about restriction and dieting from time to time, but you are confident in your ability to let such thoughts wash over you without acting on them.

You need to remain mindful of eating regularly, but it's no longer the effort that it once was.

You feel a new sense of peace. Long forgotten interests start making themselves known and discovering your true personality is no longer scary, it's exciting!

You experience true self confidence and urges to nurture yourself.

12 Months of recovery (and beyond)

Expect to feel like you're almost there.

You'll rely on recovery strategies sparingly, as new healthy habits, behaviours and coping strategies have become natural and instinctive.

From time to time you still experience fleeting negative thoughts, but they have no control over your actions and no longer cause anxiety.

Confidence in your ability to master intuitive eating continues to grow over the following months and you finally make the switch from structured eating.

You experience a strong sense of peace, contentment and wholeness and you're often overwhelmed with positivity and the reality of how far you have come.

Expect to want to share your recovery with EVERYONE, because it seems like only yesterday when you felt hopeless, lost and alone.

A real life recovery timeline.

"I consider May 20th, 2011 my "quit date" even though I binged and purged several times after that line in the sand. It was on May 20th that I made the decision to ALWAYS be in recovery for bulimia, regardless of my behaviors. From that moment on, I actively worked towards quitting and made the commitment to never again put off recovery, not even for 2 hours.

It took 6 months until the bingeing subsided and my weight was back to normal (it went up the first

months of recovery). By the 9th month, I had actually lost weight!

This was my timeline:

Month 1:

Everything was about not bingeing or purging. It was really hard. I felt like I was overeating. I isolated a lot, but I made sure to take care of myself. I didn't weigh myself. No bingeing or purging.

Month 2:

Weight gain was really upsetting, but I felt proud to see my behaviors becoming more normal. A few episodes of bingeing and purging.

Months 3 and 4:

I started running, and that made me feel a lot better. My weight was still higher than normal and I didn't feel attractive. I didn't make efforts to date or hang out. It was a lonely time, but I felt very proud of myself. My self-respect was growing and I was much more peaceful because my finances were straightening out. I slept a lot. Occasional bingeing and purging.

Months 5 and 6:

My mood improved and I dropped a little weight, bringing me back to the weight I was when I'd been bingeing and purging. My energy increased. I felt alive and optimistic again. Very few cases of bingeing and purging.

Months 7 and 8:

IN MONTH 7, I EXPERIENCED MY LAST BINGE/ PURGE. These were my miracle months!!!! I revel in the memories. :) All my cravings went away and I began eating like a "normal" person. I was able to keep food in the house. I no longer struggled with the urge to binge. I felt happy and light. It was like I was reconnecting with some woman who'd started to develop years and years ago but whose life got cut off due to bulimia.

Months 9 and 10:

It was very surprising to me and of some concern to my therapist, but I lost more weight! I was (and still am) astonished. It's true then. Bulimia had been keeping me at a weight that was HIGHER than my set-point! During these months I did a lot of planning and dreaming and preparing for the next stages of my life. I rethought my job, relationships, apartment decor, hairstyle, habits, everything... I was getting very excited about my future.

Months 11 and 12:

Still maintaining the lower weight without any food cravings, even during PMS (I eat more before my period but never have actual urges to binge). I'm in the process of getting a new job - even considering a career change - and I've started dating again. For the first time in my life, I'm dating really upstanding men, men of true character. I know it's because I respect myself and I've gotten a grip on what really matters. I'm very, very grateful. I still have emotional lows, but my worst days now are better than my best days as a bulimic.

The thing I want to emphasize is that a year is a really long period of time and a lot can change in a year. It might feel like your recovery isn't happening quickly enough, but take a step back and keep the big picture in mind. When I was frustrated by my "slow" (in my mind) progress, I would always, always ask myself, "10 years down the road, will it matter if I took 3 months versus 13 to get better?" Of course not! I'd had bulimia for 11 years and I was willing to be patient. If I hadn't been patient and instead fell prey to 'all or nothing' thinking, I might still be bulimic. I might be bulimic for another 10 years! How horrible.

It's possible! It can happen!"

A final few tips for recovery.

Never diet, instead eat regularly until you are able to listen to and trust your intuition to guide you to know what, when and how much you should eat.

Don't try to suppress negative thoughts. We have no control over our thoughts but we do have the choice to act on them or to ignore them and move on.

Trust the structured eating principles. They work.

Understand that there is no such thing as a perfect recovery. EVERYONE relapses along the way, but these episodes of relapse provide invaluable learning experiences.

Throw away your scale! Don't rely on a scale to inform you of your progress. Your mood, energy levels, reduction in binge urges and improving relationship with food and your body will tell you all you need to know about your progress.

Keep the bigger picture in mind. The time it takes you to recover is nothing compared to the amount of time you'll have to enjoy your new bulimia-free life so don't be put off by gradual progress.

Nurture and love yourself. Enjoy as much rest as possible. Minimize commitments. Smile ;) and enjoy the journey!

Remember, at ANY moment you can stop the binge-purge cycle, even when you think you've already taking actions towards a binge.

Remember that other people have done this and so can you.

Don't challenge yourself with risky situations early in recovery. Keep your food, work, and socializing as easy as you can.

Reward yourself, especially early on. Once you're better, the positive effects of recovery will be their own rewards. You need movies, gifts, and vacations NOW not "once you're better" (within the limits of being financially responsible, of course).

Always be curious about the other side of recovery: who will you be once you're recovered? If you don't stick this out, you will never get to know!

A final word

We are at the end of the program.

Within this book is just about everything you need to know to recover from bulimia. These methods have been tried and tested and they work.

This book is NOT like most books where you read it once and never read again. Refer to this book regularly throughout your recovery for guidance.

Well done for reading this course and making the first step towards recovery. Now it's up to you to follow through and apply the method to your life.

We've now reached the end, but for many this is only the beginning of a new way of life, a life free from bulimia.

Once you are recovered, you will never go back because you will have learned how to escape the

bulimia trap.

By following these steps you can have a life 100% free from bulimia. All you have to do is make the decision to commit to your recovery.

To your fantastic, amazing, adventurous, enlightening recovery!

Thank you so much,

Richard Kerr