



# Physical and psychological effect of bulimia

A person with bulimia is in a cycle of eating large amounts of food in a relatively short period of time and in a manner that feels out of control. This then leads to a desire to 'compensate' for the food that has been eaten through behaviours such as self-induced vomiting, fasting, over exercising and/or the misuse of laxatives, enemas or diuretics. These behaviours can cause significant physical and psychological effects.

## Physical effects

- Increased risk of oesophageal, stomach or bowel cancers
- Abdominal pain, bloating, constipated/diarrhoea or developing intolerances to food
- Loss of or disturbance of menstrual periods in girls and women
- Feeling tired and not sleeping well
- Frequent weight fluctuations due to fluid shifts
- Signs of damage due to vomiting include:
  - broken blood vessels and blood shot eyes
  - swelling around the cheeks or salivary glands
  - calluses on knuckles
  - Erosion of tooth enamel & dental decay and gum disease

- Sore throat, indigestion, heartburn and reflux
- Inflammation and rupture of the oesophagus and stomach
- Stomach and intestinal ulcers

Electrolyte imbalance causing:

- Fluid retention or oedema (Swelling)
- Cramps
- Fatigue
- Fainting/seizures
- Palpitations/cardiac arrhythmia/death

## Psychological effects

- Feelings of shame, self-loathing or guilt, particularly after eating and guilt
- Preoccupation with eating, food, body shape and weight
- The need for control around food
- Urge to binge
- Depression, anxiety or irritability
- Extreme body dissatisfaction/ distorted body image
- Sensitivity to comments relating to food, weight, body shape or exercise
- Loneliness and isolation associated with social withdrawal
- Erratic behaviour/mood swings
- Self-harm, substance abuse or suicide attempts

## **Dental hygiene and harm minimisation from vomiting**

During the treatment for your eating disorder, it may take a while to control the episodes of induced vomiting. To minimise the damage done by stomach acid during episodes of vomiting the following is recommended:

- Avoid brushing teeth within 30minutes of vomiting (The softened layer of enamel is easily damaged and tooth brushing after vomiting can cause the tooth to wear away very quickly as the tooth enamel is weakened during episodes of vomiting)
- Rinse your mouth with baking soda mixed in water (or non-acidic mouth wash) to neutralise the acid environment.
- Limit the intake of acidic foods (e.g. fruits, pickled products) and carbonated drinks to mealtimes.
- Finish meals with alkaline foods (e.g. milk or cheese).
- Avoid acidic foods and drinks before bedtime or prolonged sipping or holding of acidic beverages in mouth;
- Brush your teeth and gums morning and night with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.
- Spit the toothpaste out, don't rinse.
- Regular monitoring by dental practitioners is recommended:
- Regular maintenance checks with your dentist to help prevent, protect and repair any damage caused by acidic erosion.