

Reducing Vomiting in Bulimia Nervosa

Objective

To identify reasons why you vomit and develop a plan to reduce this behavior.

You Should Know

Self-induced vomiting is the most common means of purging in people with bulimia nervosa. Most people vomit immediately or soon after binge eating. It's common for people to drink excessive fluids to "float the food" and make vomiting easier. Many people begin to vomit in order to regain control after overeating or breaking their self-imposed dietary rules. Developing methods to make vomiting easier, as well as justifying the behavior, can lead to a vicious cycle of bingeing and purging. Vomiting becomes automatic and habitual.

Think back to the time when you first began this behavior. It might have occurred after you ate too much and felt nauseated. Over time you adjusted to the unpleasant sensations of vomiting. You may have avoided negative feelings, such as self-disgust or shame, and even convinced yourself it wasn't too bad. You discovered ways to make it easier, and as you vomited more frequently you started thinking differently about food and eating. Maybe you believed that you could eat as much as you wanted without gaining weight.

You might believe that you vomit all of the calories from a binge, that your body doesn't absorb any of the calories. You might be surprised to learn that food absorption begins in the mouth and esophagus. Before food reaches your stomach, your body has already begun the absorption process. Not all the food in your stomach is expelled when you vomit. Not only are there health problems associated with repeated vomiting but also the behavior is actually an ineffective weight control measure.

Besides being ineffective to help you control your weight, induced vomiting will likely cause you significant health problems, including tooth decay, swollen salivary glands, sore throat, electrolyte abnormalities, dehydration, and more.

For many people, weight loss isn't the only reason they continue this behavior. Identifying why you continue to vomit is the first step in reducing and eventually eliminating this behavior. In the following exercise, you will first identify why you vomit. Once you have identified the reasons why you vomit, you can develop a plan to stop self-induced vomiting.

Identify Why You Vomit

Directions: There are a number of reasons why people engage in self-induced vomiting. Rate yourself on the following statements. Use the scale 1 = Don't agree at all to 10 = Strongly agree.

___ I vomit to control my weight even when I don't binge.

___ I vomit to improve my mood and to counteract feeling bad about myself.

___ It's the only way I know how to deal with stress.

___ I am uncomfortable when my stomach feels "full" so I vomit to lessen this discomfort.

___ My stomach looks fat or bloated after I eat.

___ I want to have a flat stomach.

___ I am most comfortable when my stomach is empty.

___ I look forward to vomiting and plan to be alone after eating so that I can do so.

___ Vomiting is my "safety net" because I can compensate for the times I overeat.

___ I feel clean, renewed, and relaxed after I purge.

___ I "get off" and feel sexually excited from the release of vomiting.

___ I feel high and emotionally numb after I vomit.

Are there other reasons why you think you vomit? List them below. -

Make a Plan to Stop Self-Induced Vomiting

1. Choose a date and time within the next few days to begin your plan to stop self-induced vomiting. **This is the day when you're going to stop making yourself vomit.** Your chosen date should be as free of potential stressors as possible.
2. Decide what you're going to eat beforehand. It's best to start with foods that you know to be less triggering for you. It's important to allow your body to get used to the feeling of being nourished again and allow your mind to make peace with the fact that you are choosing to stop vomiting. If you purge every little bit of food that you ingest, begin by keeping down a small snack.
3. Commit to your plan. No matter how challenging it is, no matter how strong the urge is, you will not vomit. You should remember that the more vomit-free days you experience the easier it will be to avoid vomiting altogether.
4. Replace vomiting with something else; find other activities to engage in after you eat. Choose something that doesn't trigger you. Create a positive ritual that will replace vomiting. Avoid the bathroom immediately after eating. Even a 10-minute wait can drastically reduce an urge. By delaying the act of vomiting for as little as 10 minutes, you're allowing yourself time for the urge to vomit to lessen.

Think About It

How can you use the information in this exercise to develop a personal plan to reduce vomiting?

As you identified the reasons you vomit, did you think of any positive behaviors that could replace the perceived 'benefits' of vomiting?

Is there someone you trust who can help you change this behavior?

Can you think of any obstacles that might keep you from succeeding at your plan to stop your self-induced vomiting?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(**1** = not very helpful, **5** = moderately helpful, **10** = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
