



Summit Uses Latest Clinical Research to Address Binge Eating Disorder

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“FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RECORDED history, today’s youth may not have as long a lifespan as that of their parents” (Olshansky, et al, 2005). Obesity is an enormous problem in America, as most of us know. Obesity has been linked to cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, cancer, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, diabetes, depression, and anxiety. Binge eating has been considered significant enough to be given its own classification in the new version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association.

Many people taking psychotropic drugs have an increased propensity to gain weight. Though not a side effect for everyone or for all medications, weight gain is a significant issue for many people. And depression itself can cause people to have less energy to exercise. So many people with psychiatric problems have a harder time keeping weight off than their non-psychiatric counterparts.

Some medications have proved helpful in treating binge eating. Vyvanse has been cleared by the FDA as a treatment for binge eating. Several new weight-loss drugs have come on the

market, including Contrav, Belviq, and Qsymia. However, useful as these medications can be, not all people can take them.

In searching for non-pharmacological interventions for the problem of obesity and binge eating, researchers have discovered several of types of therapy have good outcomes in helping people decrease binges and lose weight. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindful eating, and interpersonal therapy have all been used successfully to help people deal with cravings. *Cognitive behavioral therapy*, which used to be the gold standard of treatment for these conditions, attempts to help people change their thoughts about food, and thus change eating patterns. *Mindful eating* involves both becoming aware of the amount of food consumed, and also discovering when one is full. Mindful eating is best taught in an experiential setting, where people get a chance to learn and practice its principles. Mindful eating groups, common on the West Coast, are beginning now to appear in the Midwest. *Interpersonal therapy* focuses on the need for people to be happy in close connection with others, and stresses the impact of unhappiness in relationships on increased emotional eating and



A new binge eating/weight loss group will be starting at Summit in April, for anyone interested in learning mindful eating. Call Sharon Beck, DNP, LCSW, at (630)260-0606 ext 131 for details.

weight gain. Most recently, these three treatment methods have begun to be used together, with positive outcomes.

In the past year, Summit Clinical Services hosted a dissertation project for staff therapist Sharon Beck, who just received her Doctorate of Nursing Practice. Her dissertation was a pilot study which measured participants’ scores on The Binge Eating Scale and the Beck Depression Inventory before and after learning mindful eating. The mindful-eating intervention was based on the work of Jan Chozen Bays, *Mindful Eating, Conscious Living: Regaining a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food*. All participants were taking some form of psychotropic medication and believed they had begun to gain weight when they started the medication. The women in the group learned many forms of meditation to assist with binge eating and overeating, as well as ways to increase exercise.

Results of the project were strongly positive. Binge eating decreased in frequency and intensity, and scores on the Beck Depression Inventory also decreased significantly. In addition, patient satisfaction scores were very high, as assessed by qualitative interviews with a nurse from a local hospital. ■



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Q&A

Q Why does my doctor tell me that exercise can help with my mood and anxiety?

A Even as little as 10 minutes of rigorous exercise can change your brain chemistry. Exercise is a great stress reducer, as it releases natural endorphins, which produce feelings of happiness and euphoria. Research shows that exercise may be as effective as antidepressants for mild depression and anxiety, as aerobic activity is related to an increased release of serotonin and dopamine. It also appears to improve connections between the brain cells and stimulate the growth of neurons in the areas of the brain already damaged by depression.

Physical activity can also improve memory and learning as well as recover damage done by chronic stress and the process of aging. In addition, exercise may help you with self-esteem and better social interactions.

Regular increased physical activity is the perfect complement for those on psychotropic medications as well; it helps to maintain or achieve healthy weight and becomes an additional invaluable tool to improve overall mental health. Studies also show that people who exercise regularly have longer remission of depression and may reduce the need for medications in the future. ■

Anna Mackender, M.D.,
is a board-certified psychiatrist.

The Faulty Mirror of Social Media

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL Eating Disorder Association (NEDA), children as young as six years old are concerned about their weight and physical appearance, and approximately half of elementary school girls voice fears of being “too fat.” As a professional and as a parent, I find these statistics to be very scary. What factors could be so powerful to influence so many people, especially starting at such a young age? Of course, family and friends impact our children, but possibly more influential is the strong presence of cultural and social pressures.

Social media is everywhere—on television, on the Internet, in magazines, even in our schools; and some studies show children are exposed to at least 7.5 hours of media per day, leaving much room for impact.

Social media tends to glamorize “the perfect body,” creating sadness, anxiety, and shame for those who feel they cannot reach

this unattainable goal. With females, “the perfect body” revolves around thinness, where with males, it may revolve more around having muscles. It is easy for people to compare themselves to others in photos and create unrealistic goals for weight loss. Many turn to restricting food intake and/or purging to reach these goals, and may even feel justified indirectly or directly due to support online.

Fortunately, some sites are working to shut down support for risky eating behaviors. For example, Pinterest has banned the use of “thinspiration”-related information, which tends to be associated with pro-anorexic groups. Other social networking sites have developed controls for parents to limit what their children are viewing and sharing online. There is an abundance of support through social media as well, including resources from professional websites (NEDA and American Psychiatric Association)

as well as local groups that support healthy eating and exercise routines.

You and I can also support others by being healthy role models ourselves, as well as discouraging words such as *fat* and, instead, encouraging body confidence and healthy habits.



If you or someone you know is demonstrating eating disorder behaviors, please reach out for professional help here at Summit Clinical Services or within your community. ■

Danielle Romano-Cihak, Psy.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist, working with children, young adults and families to build and implement coping skills and communication strategies.

Mood and Food...is there a connection?

Have you ever noticed how your mood can be impacted by medical, relationship, or financial stress? Well, food can impact our mood, also! Ongoing research indicates that, in some ways, diet may influence mood. While certain diets or foods may not ease depression, (or put you instantly in a better mood), they may help as part of an overall treatment plan. We don't have the whole story yet, but there are some interesting clues.

“One of the symptoms used to diagnose depression is change in appetite, so there certainly could be a link between diet and depression,” says Anil Malhotra, MD, director of psychiatric research at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, NY.

Food choices do have significant importance when it comes to our mental health. In a very real sense,

we have TWO brains—one in our head, and one in our gut—both of which are created from the same tissue during fetal development. These two systems are connected via our vagus nerve, the tenth cranial nerve that runs from our brain stem down to our abdomen. It is now well established that the vagus nerve is the primary route our gut bacteria use to transmit information to our brain. Maintaining optimal gut health is therefore paramount when trying to address our mental state and to maintain a positive mood.

Food affects the body's metabolism, hormones, and neurotransmitters (mood chemicals that are produced in the brain), and these in turn influence our emotions, concentration and energy, according to Dr. Nishi Dhawan,

who is co-founder (along with Dr. Bal Pawa) of the Westcoast Women's Clinic in Vancouver.

Proteins, carbohydrates, and vitamins work to keep our metabolism, hormones, and neurotransmitters in check, which also balances our moods. By contrast, consuming too much sugar, alcohol, and caffeine can cause low moods by bringing on an inflammatory response in the nervous system, says Dhawan.

The link between diet and mental health probably goes both ways. If you have mental health issues, it may make it harder for you to eat well. A poor diet may also contribute to poor mental health! ■

Bonnie Knox, L.C.P.C., C.A.D.C., provides individual and family therapy to adolescents and adults. In addition to treating depression and anxiety disorders along with addictions, she specializes in offering EMDR services.