

What feet · muscle
weakness · dry skin



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What is Bulimia Nervosa? Bulimia nervosa is a potentially deadly eating disorder affecting nearly 3% of all Americans at some point in their lives (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2018). Mainly affecting women, the defining characteristics of bulimia nervosa are reoccurring cycles of binge eating and purging. The patient feels out of control while bingeing, and may consume thousands of calories in a single meal.

Purging serves the purpose of compensating for binge eating, for which the patient holds a great amount of guilt and self-loathing. To regain a sense of control, the patient will attempt to “undo” what they have eaten; this may be accomplished by inducing vomiting, misuse of medications (laxatives, diuretics, etc.), fasting, or obsessive exercise. Causes of Bulimia Nervosa In the past, there was a misconception that dysfunctional family relationships were the cause of eating disorders.

While these relationships may exacerbate factors contributing to bulimia, they are no longer considered to be the cause. One consistent theme with all eating disorders is that the patient has an unhealthy obsession with controlling their food consumption, weight, and personal appearance. However, there is not one specific cause of bulimia nervosa; there are many factors that can make a person susceptible to developing bulimia nervosa. Bulimia may be hereditary or a result of a neurologic abnormality. Some patients may use bulimia as a method of coping with sexual or physical abuse, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, or other emotional pain or trauma (The Center For Eating Disorders, 2018).

Regardless of the underlying cause, bulimianervosa patients are desperate to find relief from the unbearable lack of control they feel over their own life.

Bulimia Nervosa: Signs and Symptoms Unfortunately, people with bulimia are extremely proficient at covering their disorder. In fact, most people with bulimia are of normal weight or overweight. The earlier a patient is diagnosed and treated, the greater their chance of recovery. Knowing how to recognize the signs and symptoms of bulimia nervosa is vital, because of all psychiatric diseases, bulimia nervosa is amongst the most fatal.

Physical Symptoms · Fluctuating weight · Gastrointestinal issues ·

Fainting, or Syncope · Irregular/absent periods · Impaired immunity

· Poor wound healing · Cold hands and feet · Muscle weakness ·

Dry skin and nails · Difficulty sleeping · Dental problems · Anemia

· Hypothyroid · Hypokalemia · Bradycardia · Cuts or callouses on

the knuckles **Behavioral Signs** Recognizing the behavioral or emotional signs of bulimia is significantly more challenging; the patient makes a conscious effort to hide behaviors that may raise suspicion. One of the signs of bulimia is an increased and/or unusual focus on body image, weight loss, exercise, and food. Eating behaviors may change; the patient may prefer to eat alone, skip meals, or adapt food rituals. The patient frequently disappears after meals and is isolating oneself from friends and family in order to conceal purging rituals. Large amounts of food or food wrappers and containers may be hidden to avoid discovery (National Eating Disorders Association, 2018). Individually, any of these signs may not cause a friend or relative to become suspicious; however, knowing the signs and symptoms of bulimia can help a

person put together the clues of bulimia nervosa in order to get professional help.

Bulimia Nervosa: Medical Complications As a result of inadequate nutrition and purging, misuse of laxatives, and/or excessive exercise, serious medical complications may occur. Cardiac implications may include cardiomyopathy, tachycardia, dysrhythmias, cardiac arrest, murmur, or mitral valve prolapse. Fluids and electrolyte imbalances are likely. Metabolic alkalosis resulting in elevated bicarbonate, hypochloremia, hypokalemia, and dehydration are common. Dehydration leads to stimulation of the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system, leading to further potassium loss. Gastrointestinal consequences consist of elevated serum amylase levels leading to the parotid gland becoming enlarged, esophageal tears, and gastric dilation and severe pain in the abdomen.

Other complications that may be seen are erosion and attrition of the teeth, loss of the dental arch, and difficulty chewing (Varcarolis, 2017). Bulimia

Nervosa: The Nursing Process Assessment priority is to stabilize the patient after a complete examination and obtaining an electrocardiogram and the following laboratory test results: electrolytes, glucose, thyroid function, and CBC. The patient should be evaluated for comorbidity, as depression, anxiety or other psychiatric disorders are common in bulimic patients; a psychiatric consult should be arranged.