

Binge eating more likely to lead to health risks in men

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Binge eating is a problem affecting both men and women, however, obese men who binge are more likely than their female counterparts to have elevated cholesterol and high blood pressure, finds a new study in *General Hospital Psychiatry*.

Men have generally been under-represented in studies of obesity and of binge eating disorder, said Tomoko Udo, Ph.D., associate research scientist in psychiatry at Yale University and lead author of the study. "People used to think binge eating was less common in men than women," she said.

Binge eating disorder is defined as the repeated consumption of large

quantities of food in a short period of time without some other compensatory activity, such as the vomiting seen in bulimia. People with binge eating disorder also report feeling a loss of control over their eating.

The study examined 190 people (141 women and 49 men) who were seeking treatment for obesity and binge eating disorder in a [primary care](#) setting. Even after adjusting for race and [body mass index](#), men were three times as likely to meet the criteria for [metabolic syndrome](#), a condition that increases the [risk of cardiovascular disease](#).

The study group was comprised of people who sought help with their weight, which may have a bearing on the higher incidence of metabolic syndrome seen in men, she said. Men are often less likely to seek medical help, which may mean that men who do may be suffering more from consequences of obesity and binge eating, she pointed out.

Overall, the study found few psychological differences between men and women with binge eating disorder, except that women were more likely than men to become overweight earlier and to attempt dieting earlier and men were more likely to say that they engaged in strenuous physical activity in an attempt to lose weight.

"This study is important because it focused on real-world data collection in the primary care setting," said Martin Binks, Ph.D., associate professor of [nutritional sciences](#) at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX, and a spokesperson for The Obesity Society. Cultural issues may lead to under diagnosis of [binge eating](#) in men, he added. "It is considered manly to consume big portions," he noted.

Primary care settings provide a potential valuable opportunity to implement interventions or to provide appropriate specialist referrals for obese patients with [binge eating disorder](#), conclude the researchers.

Primary care physicians may not understand that binge eaters may have psychological issues, Udo added. "Many doctors do not know the special needs of binge eaters," she noted.

"We tend to have a 'one size fits all' view of weight management," Binks said. "But [binge eaters] are qualitatively different than your average person who needs to lose weight," he noted.

More information: Udo T, McKee SA, White MA, et al. Sex differences in biopsychosocial correlates of binge eating disorder: A study of treatment-seeking obese adults in primary care setting, *General Hospital Psychiatry*.

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