

Binge-eating disorder not as transient as previously thought

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Binge-eating disorder is the most prevalent eating disorder in the United States, but previous studies have presented conflicting views of the disorder's duration and the likelihood of relapse. A new five-year study

led by investigators from McLean Hospital, a member of the Mass General Brigham health care system, showed that 61% and 45% of individuals still experienced binge-eating disorder 2.5 and 5 years after their initial diagnoses, respectively. These results contradict previous prospective studies that documented faster remission times, according to the authors.

"The big takeaway is that binge-eating disorder does improve with time, but for many people it lasts years," said first author Kristin Javaras, DPhil, Ph.D., assistant psychologist in the Division of Women's Mental Health at McLean.

"As a [clinician](#), oftentimes the clients I work with report many, many years of binge-eating disorder, which felt very discordant with studies that suggested that it was a transient disorder. It's very important to understand how long binge-eating disorder lasts and how likely people are to relapse so that we can better provide better care."

The results were published May 28 in *Psychological Medicine*.

Binge-eating disorder, which is estimated to impact somewhere between 1% and 3% of U.S. adults, is characterized by episodes during which people feel a loss of control over their eating. The average age of onset is 25 years.

While previous retrospective studies, which rely on people's sometimes-faulty memories, have reported that binge-eating disorder lasts seven to sixteen years on average, prospective studies tracking individuals with the disorder over time have suggested that many individuals with the disorder enter remission within a much smaller timeframe—from one to two years.

However, the researchers noted that most previous prospective studies

had limitations, including a [small sample size](#) (

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