How you bring up binge eating disorder (BED) makes all the difference

Deep shame and guilt may cause patients to hide their symptoms\(^1\)—even from their psychiatrists. Try these suggested tips to help encourage your patients to open up about symptoms of BED.\(^2\)

### STARTING THE CONVERSATION:

**6 tips for helping patients open up about binge eating disorder**

1. **Look for an opening and ask one more question**

   If weight becomes a topic of conversation, follow up with a question that encourages more discussion. You might find that taking the time to ask an additional question may help your patient open up and may lead to a productive discussion.\(^2\)

   **TRY…**

   > Some people eat a lot more than they think they should be eating, but they have a sense of losing control when they do this. Can you describe a time this might have happened to you?

2. **Give patients the freedom to talk**

   Many patients may suspect that there is something wrong with their eating behavior, but are embarrassed to bring it up. If they feel like they’re going to be judged, they may avoid the conversation.\(^2\)

   **TRY…**

   > I’m here to help you work through this issue, and I am on your side. Can you help me understand your concerns with eating?

3. **Ask if it’s okay to talk about weight or eating behaviors**

   A recent study showed that bringing up weight can shut down a conversation with a patient who has BED.\(^2\) Asking permission to talk with them about their binge eating may be an approach that helps foster a productive conversation.

   **TRY…**

   > In the past you’ve mentioned that you struggle with your weight, and I have some questions that may help us work on that together, if that’s okay with you. I think it could be beneficial.

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\(^1\)These tips were derived from a study that reviewed conversations between patients (n=38) and their psychiatrists (n=11).\(^2\)
BED is thought to be the result of a combination of factors including a genetic predisposition, interpersonal stressors, and neurobiological influences, and simple willpower can’t conquer these.\(^1,3\)

**TRY…** “There’s a recognized disorder that causes people to binge eat, even when they try not to. I think it would be helpful to talk about the symptoms to see if this disorder might be causing some issues for you.”

**LOOK FOR PATTERNS ASSOCIATED WITH BED**

Overeating is something that many people may do, but binge eating disorder usually follows a cycle of obsessive thoughts, compulsive urges, bingeing, and distress.\(^1,2\)

**TRY…** “Sometimes people may eat so much in one sitting that they feel uncomfortably full, which leaves them feeling embarrassed and guilty about it, but they find themselves thinking about doing it again and again. Can you tell me about a time this might have happened to you?”

**KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE EMOTIONS, NOT THE FOOD**

A barrier to dialogue may be a focus on the food a patient is eating, rather than the emotions the patient is feeling.\(^2\)

**TRY…** “Some people find that binge eating may help them cope with difficult emotions. Let’s explore if something like that might apply to you.”

Learn more at [BurdenofBED.com](http://BurdenofBED.com)

Start the BED conversation