



# Restrict-Binge Cycle

Binge eating (consuming a large quantity of food in one sitting, usually to the point of discomfort) or overeating often occurs in response to undereating or intentionally restricting one's food intake. The restrict-binge cycle starts in an attempt to control weight by restricting one's food intake. The body becomes depleted of the fuel it needs and results in extreme hunger and increased thoughts about food and eating. This leads to a person becoming more susceptible to binge eating and often results in feelings of guilt, shame, blame or fear about food and body image, potentially starting the cycle all over again.

## Effects of restricting food intake

- Decreased leptin (increases appetite, decreases metabolism)
- Nutrient deficiencies
- Fatigue
- Loss of muscle mass
- Bone loss
- Increased risk for infertility
- Decreased immune system

## Signs you're at risk of binge eating

- Avoid food or wait to eat despite feelings of hunger.
- Avoid the consumption of certain foods or food groups.
- Excessively think about or feel out of control around food.
- Eating pattern isn't sustainable and/or includes "cheat" days or breaks from a diet.
- Feel bad, guilty, ashamed, out of control or fearful about eating certain foods.
- Diet or restrict food intake in response to overeating or eating more than you intended.
- Feel out of control with food in situations outside of your complete control (i.e. social events, restaurants, free food).

## Steps to break the cycle

1. **Spread your food intake throughout the day** by eating within 1-2 hours after waking up and every 3-4 hours after that, depending on what and how much you eat in one sitting. This can help keep you satisfied and maintain your energy levels, mood, concentration, stamina, etc.
2. **Consume a mix of macronutrients** (carbohydrate, protein, fat) for most meals and snacks to satisfy and sustain you throughout the day.
3. **Incorporate the restricted food group** you tend to binge/over-eat (i.e. carbohydrate, fat). This meets your body's needs, and allows more variety and better satisfaction which can help regain control in the long-term.
4. **Incorporate the specific food** you restrict yourself from eating. Eat in a way that helps you feel in control with a version of the food you currently feel comfortable with by deciding when and how much to eat.
5. **Identify triggers** that lead to overeating, such as physical (i.e. overly hungry, tired), emotional (i.e. stressed, sad), or situational (i.e. lonely, bored), and consider how you can meet your needs.
6. **Honor your hunger** and eat the same amount of food as usual throughout the day after you overeat/binge. This may seem counter-intuitive and you may want to resist. However, restricting your food intake, skipping meals or snacks, or waiting to eat when hungry sets you up to repeat the restrict-binge cycle.
7. **Engage support** of a family member, friend, therapist or dietitian.

