

# **THE WEIGHT STIGMA BARRIER TO SEEKING BINGE EATING DISORDER TREATMENT**

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**BED is the most common eating disorder in the United States, affecting 3.5% of women and 2% of men. However, despite its prevalence, many individuals with BED face significant barriers when it comes to seeking the treatment they need.**

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is a serious and often misunderstood eating disorder. It is identified by repeated episodes of consuming large amounts of food in a short period of time, followed by loss of control and intense feelings of guilt and shame afterwards.

## **A PRIMARY BARRIER IS WEIGHT STIGMA**

Weight stigma includes negative attitudes and discrimination based on body weight and size. In a culture that often idolizes thinness and associates larger bodies with poor health, there's a misconception that eating disorders only affect those who are underweight or of average body size. Because of the bias, individuals with BED, who often have larger bodies, may be overlooked by healthcare providers. Some individuals fear that treatment will only be weight-loss focuses instead of addressing the emotional and behavioral components of the disorder. This is a common concern considering some providers have mistakenly focused on weight loss as the primary treatment goal, which is problematic. Focusing on weight loss can reinforce disordered eating behaviors by perpetuating the cycle of restriction and binge eating that many individuals with BED struggle with. Treatment should address underlying emotional triggers, not external factors like appearance.

## **ANOTHER TREATMENT BARRIER: THE FEAR OF JUDGMENT AND SHAME IN MEDICAL SETTINGS**

Seeking help for binge eating can be incredibly intimidating, and this is true for those who have experienced weight-based discrimination from healthcare providers in the past. These experiences cause mistrust with the providers, making individuals hesitant to pursue treatment. Unfortunately, the fear of being judged for their weight only increases the guilt and self-blame that those with BED already experience. In turn, this cycle of shame can delay diagnosis and recovery, leaving individuals struggling in silence.

## **BED REQUIRES PROPER CARE, TREATMENT, AND RESPECT**

It's important to recognize that bodies come in all shapes and sizes, and all deserve respectful care. Unfortunately, not all bodies are treated equally. At Esperanza, we are dedicated to educating the community and training professionals on the harmful effects of weight stigma. By raising awareness, and advocating for compassionate, weight-inclusive care, we can create a supportive environment where individuals with BED feel encouraged to seek the help they need.

