

- 1 Monitor your eating:** Keep a record of everything you eat and when you eat it. Also record when you engage in bingeing or vomiting. On your diary sheet also keep a record of your thoughts and feelings. Examine your diary sheet and see if there is a particular pattern or triggers.
- 2 Institute a meal plan:** The next stage involves gradually learning to eat regularly and more specifically. It means attempting to eat three meals a day with two or three snacks. Your immediate reaction might be that this is a recipe for weight gain but this is actually not the case. Eating regular meals does not make you fat. Decide on certain times for eating and make an effort to stick to those times. For example breakfast 7.30 am, snack 10.00 am, lunch 1.00 pm, snack 4.30 pm, supper 7.30 pm, snack 10.30 pm. The idea of eating regularly is to displace the tendency to binge, so the time between episodes of planned eating is quite short, only 3 to 4 hours. Plan the content of meals ahead of time.
- 3 Learning to intervene and prevent bingeing:**

  - a Enlist support. It is often very helpful to enlist the help of a close friend or relative to help you out with this programme.
  - b Prepare a list of alternative activities that might be useful to implement if you feel things are going wrong or you have the urge to binge. It is helpful if these activities require physical activity, the use of your hands, they are away from your habitual eating place such as the kitchen, they are pleasurable and 'easily do-able'. A list might include; phoning a friend, going for a walk or a bike ride, playing a musical instrument, doing the garden, having a bath etc.
  - c Restrict eating to one or two specified areas within the house, such as the kitchen or dining room.
  - d Eat slowly and do not engage in any other activities while eating such as reading or watching television.
- e** Before eating plan exactly what you are going to do when you have finished your meal.
- f** Limit the amount of bingeable food in the house. Do not leave leftovers around. Always put food away. Buy small quantities of food. Never eat directly from containers, always place food on a plate.
- g** When shopping for food prepare a list of what you are going to buy. Do not shop when you are hungry or when you are vulnerable to binge.
- h** Do not let other people bully you into eating food you do not want. Practice saying 'No, thank you'.
- 4 Problem solving:** It is important for people with bulimia nervosa to recognise that often they use food as a way of solving problems which overwhelm them. The person with bulimia needs to ask themselves the question, 'Why do I have an urge to over-eat now? What is the problem that lies behind the feeling?' Try and write down what you think the problem is. What is going through your head?
- 5 Changing beliefs and thoughts:** Reconsider the link between self-esteem and body weight and shape. Make a list of personal attributes you consider valuable in others and then yourself. How high does size and weight come? Challenge 'perfectionism' and 'all or nothing thinking'.
- 6 Eliminate dieting:** When you reach this stage it is likely that your control is precarious, as you are only eating small quantities of low calorie food. Consider which foods and situations you avoid because you consider them to be 'dangerous' and institute a programme for gradual re-introduction. Like treating any phobia draw up a hierarchy and starting with the easiest begin to confront them.
- 7 Expect a relapse:** Everybody will relapse. Do not blame yourself, but try to understand what has happened and learn from it. Do not abandon your programme.