

CONSEQUENCES OF VOMITING

Vomiting may cause weight loss in the short-term but over time it becomes less and less effective or may even cause weight gain because the body adapts. Eventually 30-50% of the binge calories are retained after vomiting (i.e. if the binge was 2000 calories, between 600 and 1000 calories end up being digested and absorbed). In addition -

- vomiting causes severe disruption of appetite control mechanisms and, over time, this impairs the ability to sense fullness even after large amounts of food have been eaten
- frequent vomiting (7.5x per week or more often) causes a significant reduction in metabolic rate and this can lead to easy weight gain over the long term
- vomiting over-excites the vagus nerve (the main nerve that sends information from the abdominal organs to the brain) and then this over-excited nerve generates urges to continue bingeing/vomiting
- vomiting can cause medical complications including dehydration, electrolyte disturbances, dental damage, salivary gland enlargement, bloating, diarrhea, heartburn, esophageal tears, heartburn, vomit in the lungs (“aspiration”)

After vomiting ceases and eating normalizes it can take several months for the adverse metabolic changes to go away. In the meantime a recovering person may experience strong hunger for up to six weeks.

SEEK MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY:

If you experience any of the following:

- two or more mouthfuls of bright red blood may indicate an esophageal tear
- projectile vomiting (not self-induced) after each attempt to eat may indicate gastric dilatation
- shortness of breath may indicate aspiration

Reference: Reiff, D. and Lampson-Reiff KK., *Eating Disorders: Nutrition Therapy in the Recovery Process*. Maryland. Aspen Publications 1992 pg 246