

SPACE TO BREATHE

Purging Is Not Only Vomiting

Recognising compensatory behaviours and why help matters

Purging means trying to compensate for eating or influence weight or shape through harmful behaviours. Vomiting is one form, but people may also misuse laxatives, diuretics or other medicines, fast for long periods, or use driven exercise. Any of these can carry serious medical and psychological risks.

UNDERSTAND**NOTICE****SUPPORT**

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- Behaviours may be hidden
- Why purging is dangerous
- Urgent warning signs

Use this guide to understand, begin a conversation, or help someone feel less alone.

You do not need to read it all at once. Pause whenever you need to and return when you feel ready.

A compassionate information guide

This resource offers general information and does not replace individual medical or specialist eating-disorder care.

Understanding what may be happening

Behaviours may be hidden

- Leaving quickly after meals or running taps to disguise sounds.
- Repeatedly buying laxatives, diuretics or weight-control products.
- Skipping later food to compensate for an earlier meal.
- Exercising despite injury, exhaustion or medical advice.
- Secrecy, shame and promises that it will be the final time.

Why purging is dangerous

- Vomiting and medicines can disturb fluid and electrolytes, affecting the heart.
- Acid exposure may damage teeth, mouth, throat and oesophagus.
- Laxatives do not remove most absorbed energy and can harm bowel function.
- The binge-purge or restriction-purge cycle can become more entrenched.

Urgent warning signs

- Fainting, chest pain, irregular heartbeat, confusion or severe weakness.
- Blood in vomit, black stools, severe abdominal pain or breathing difficulty.
- Inability to keep fluids down, severe dehydration or immediate risk of harm.

Gentle, practical ways forward

Support should always be adapted to the person, their diagnosis, physical health, culture, neurotype and treatment plan.

WHAT MAY HELP

- Tell a GP or eating-disorder team exactly which behaviours and products are involved.
- Do not suddenly change frequent laxative or medicine misuse without clinical advice.
- Arrange dental care and explain acid exposure without shame.
- Use supported time after meals if this is part of the treatment plan.
- Seek urgent help for any emergency signs.

A gentle reminder

Purging is not a failure of willpower. It is a serious symptom that deserves medical assessment and specialist care.

Please seek urgent help for fainting, chest pain, confusion, severe weakness, uncontrolled vomiting, blood, serious dehydration, or immediate risk of harm. In the UK call 999/A&E; for an emergency, NHS 111 for urgent advice, or contact your GP/eating-disorder team.

Trusted information

NHS: Eating disorders overview

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/behaviours/eating-disorders/overview/>

NICE: Eating disorders: recognition and treatment (NG69)

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng69>

Royal College of Psychiatrists: Medical Emergencies in Eating Disorders (MEED)

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/campaigning-for-better-mental-health-policy/college-reports/2022-college-reports/cr233>

Beat: Eating-disorder information and support

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>

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