

## My journey with anorexia nervosa

I never in a million years thought anorexia would be something that would affect me in fact I vividly remember saying as a child 'I love food way too much that would never happen to me' but it did, and it can happen to anyone.

My journey with anorexia starts as the first lockdown ended. I had never worried about what I looked like before and being healthy regarding exercise and eating healthy. However, when lockdown ended, I really struggled, I had this newfound anxiety over meeting people- what would they think, do they think I'm pretty and smart enough?

I have always been an overthinker, but it was on a different level. I had just finished high school and was moving on in my life, going to a brand-new college where I knew all of two people. I had told myself as I began college that I was going to become 'that girl' that you see on social media who went to the gym, ate only clean foods and prioritised working to be what I deemed 'perfect'.

When I started at college, I just wasn't myself I managed to make friends but this constant voice in my head telling me I wasn't good enough held me back from being my true self with them. I started going to the gym more and eating less and less focussing on clean foods that I deemed healthy giving up anything sweet which I used to love. My period had stopped quite abruptly but I was in denial that anything was wrong and because I wasn't 'skinny' enough to have anorexia.

The first time I realised something was wrong was on our family holiday over easter. I am very close to my family and our little trips away, but this time was different I was full of dread and anxiety over the fact I was going to have to eat 'convenient' or 'junk' food. I vividly remember breaking down multiple times that weekend screaming at my family over the fact they were taking me to a burger restaurant. My parents started to get genuinely worried and upset because they didn't know what to do but I was still in denial I just saw what I was saying as me trying to be healthy and I didn't understand all the fuss that I now know was just my family showing me they cared.

After that holiday things only proceeded to get worse, I was so blindsided by the fact that everyone applauded me on being 'so productive' and 'having my life together' and at the end of the day that's what I wanted. I have always been close with my family; they mean the world to me, but I pushed them away. There is one time where I was sat in therapy, and I just burst out crying talking about my sister. Me and my sister have always been close but she deals with emotions very differently to me there was one time during my recovery where we went out for coffee and cake and I just broke down in front of her saying I couldn't have a cake and a milky coffee and I remember my mum telling me she'd had a message from my sister saying that she couldn't do it anymore, she couldn't be around me because she couldn't deal with the fact there was nothing she could do to help me. I was 17 and going to parties and yet I wouldn't drink because of anxiety over calories, and I avoided social situations where I knew food would be involved and so I never felt as close to people because they didn't know me, I barely knew myself anorexia consumed me.

This was one of the biggest driving points for me to recover. I love my friends and my family and a life without them just wasn't worth it. I never stopped eating or stopped going out and I think that's a big misconception about anorexia, but I could just tell in myself I wasn't the same person as I used to be. I think it was the third time I went to the doctors for my period that I got told I was going to have to start getting help for anorexia. I had lost excessive amounts of weight since the last time I went in, and the scariest thing is I had no idea. Throughout my ED, I never weighed myself as being 'skinny' was never the end goal for me. I just wanted to be 'healthy' and make my family proud of me for being what I thought was 'perfect'.

I got put onto the **FREED programme** very quickly seeking almost immediate help and I am just so grateful I did when I did. Even after I got help it took me quite a long time to establish anything was wrong, I still pushed people away and anorexia still consumed me it's not a quick easy fix. I got to see a therapist weekly who I got to tell my story to, and I started to understand that maybe I wasn't okay and this 'healthy' lifestyle I had created in my head maybe wasn't so healthy at all.

I struggled to gain weight back as I was in denial that I needed to gain for a very long time, but I was determined to continue with my life focussing on my studies and getting into a university to do what I wanted to do. A lot of people feared me going to university, but it honestly was the best thing I ever did. I was so determined to let anorexia go it was not going to ruin another chapter of my life. I was getting support from my councillor throughout my transition and the best part was nobody at university knew me as the girl with anorexia. So, I relied on my personality to make friends and progress.

I have realised now that who I am as a person is so so so much more important than being an unrealistic version of what I deemed as 'perfection.' Looking after myself and ensuring I'm fuelling myself to have energy to be the best version of me is what I should prioritise over everything. I have started not being afraid to spontaneously go out for food and I see how beautiful the world is again. As well as this I have got my sister and my friends back who I had pushed away for so long. Even the people at college who I never felt close to before just by being myself over text I have gotten closer to.

I know anorexia doesn't just leave you overnight and it's a long battle that can affect any one of us. One thing I have realised throughout my journey though is how strong I am as a person and how strong we all are, our minds are incredible and if I use it for something positive, I believe there's nothing stopping us from achieving whatever it is we want most. Anorexia is one of the hardest things ever to recover from and there's times where I have wanted nothing more than to just disappear, there's ups there's downs but if I know if I can get through anorexia, I can get through anything