

Natalie Stevens

“My eating disorder began when I was seventeen. I met a girl at college who overheard a conversation with a friend about how I wanted to lose weight, but wasn’t sure how. A girl I had never previously met or spoken to approached me, and told me she had overheard that I wanted to lose weight. She assured me that she could help, and asked me to meet her outside Morrison’s before college in the morning. She advised me not to eat before meeting her and that she would explain more face-to-face. For some reason I did exactly what she said. That’s where it began.



“I turned up to Morrison’s the following morning, skipping breakfast like she told me to. She walked me to the fridge, picked up a carton of smoothie and told me that was all I was allowed to have. No food, just the strawberry and banana smoothie or water if I was thirsty. I listened. From then on, I listened to everything that she told me to do. It went from drinking the smoothie, to drinking half, to nothing. It then became a competition on who could go the longest period of time without food.

“My weight obviously began to drop. I started off at a size 20/22, and within 12 months I was a size 4/6. Living off such a little amount of food made me extremely tired and I had little-to-no energy, so relied on black coffee and sugar-free energy drinks to get through the day. I masked the hunger pains with painkillers and drank a lot of fizzy pop to bloat me and stop me from eating. It was all I could think about from morning to night.”

Mental effects

“Three to four months after I stopped eating, I didn’t feel so much like I had a fear of food, but I developed a fascination with it. I found myself playing with food, using it in art projects, covering people in food and having them pose for my photography class.

“Eventually it all becomes about being in control. I was arguing with myself; trying to reason with myself that what I was doing was dangerously unhealthy, but it had taken over me to the point where I felt like I was two different people. A part of you wants to cry out for help, hoping someone will catch you and force you to get help, but you can’t ask for help. You can’t because if you tell someone, then it’s all over, you’re not in control anymore and you’re going to end up fat again. When I was taking laxatives, I would time them so I needed the toilet in the early hours of the morning, so I wouldn’t get caught. I also remember being in the bathroom at 2am in agony, after overdosing on half a box of laxatives, wishing my Mum would get out of bed to use the toilet and catch me, but it never happened.

“When my long term relationship ended at the beginning of 2015, I remember sitting at the bottom of the bed trying to put a 'positive spin' on it. I remember saying to myself: "you are hurting so bad that you feel sick, you can't eat, and how long can you go?!" I focused on not eating and consequently feeling happy because I knew I was losing weight. My life was falling apart and I had no control over anything, apart from this. I knew losing weight would make me happy.

“My parents didn’t notice for a while. They could see that I was losing weight but didn’t realise how. I would make a bowl of Weetabix in the morning with very little milk, mush it up together, and spoon most of it into the bin. I would then smear the rest of it around the bowl and leave it, so when my mum saw the bowl in the kitchen - it looked as though I had eaten. When my weight started to drop rapidly, my mother became very suspicious. I used to spend

a lot of time at my friend's house and her parents knew that I had a problem, but never said anything to my Mother or Father. I was in their house most of the time, so they kept an eye on me and made me sit down and eat food with them. They wouldn't force me to eat the same as them; I would choose what I wanted, but they insisted I ate. At this point I had become bulimic. I was overdosing on diet pills and laxatives, and still challenging myself to see how long I could go without food.

"All of this finally took its toll on me; I was dying. I went to sleep next to my friend and when she woke in the morning, I was lying next to her with my eyes rolling, not able to talk or move. I couldn't see her but I could sense she was panicking, I couldn't hear what she was yelling, but I knew she was. At that point I had gone three days without any food. I remember lying there feeling light as a feather, as if I was floating and I can honestly say I felt happy. I didn't feel anxious, sad or worried. I felt like I had achieved something. Sadly, this didn't scare me enough to start getting better.

Getting Help

"I never actually went for medical help. After my near miss, my friend's parents negotiated that I stayed with them and tried to get better under their roof. In return, they agreed they wouldn't tell my parents what had happened. I was about nineteen when that happened.

So now I had to eat, I started to count calories. Counting calories meant that I could keep control by burning off everything I ate through exercise. I would always burn off 500 extra calories just to be certain that I lost weight rather than maintained. I would never really eat more than 500-700 calories a day. This went on for two and a half years; until I met someone romantically.

"When I started the relationship I didn't want my partner to know I had a problem, so I ate. I ate what he gave me, which unfortunately included a lot of fried breakfasts and take away. I started to gain weight, and eventually went back up to a size 16. I became depressed and can honestly say that I struggled. From the ages of 21-24, I was bingeing because I was depressed, and then forcing myself to throw it up. I struggled getting my partner to understand that I wanted to lose weight the healthy way, and I could never get through to him. We argued about food all the time, about how I wouldn't eat certain things and how I had a problem. He didn't want to deal with someone who had a problem, so I pretended I didn't and carried on as normal. I spiralled back down towards rock bottom, ended up relapsing, and the arguments about food continued.

"Now I am 25, and I still can't say I have the best relationship with food. I still don't eat a lot of hot meals and struggle with food and my weight. Right now, I am learning more about nutrition, what my body needs, what's good for me and how I should look after myself. I'm trying to focus more on health than losing weight, but my weight is still something that I think about all the time. I wouldn't say I have recovered, but I don't feel like you can ever fully recover if you have had a bad relationship with food, because it's always at the back of your mind.

"All I can suggest is that you focus on being healthy, challenging that control to go in a healthy direction."