

Juliana, 26

University student living with anorexia nervosa who obsessed over her body image & weight for most of her teens, **ADELAIDE**

University student, Juliana, 26, Adelaide, was diagnosed with the potentially devastating mental illness anorexia nervosa, at the age of 14.

Throughout high school and at university, Juliana continued to wage a battle with the illness.

Fortunately, armed with invaluable and longstanding support from her family and friends, she is continuing to work hard to mount a recovery from anorexia nervosa.

This is Juliana's story.

"Growing up, I was always aware of my body shape. I was never happy with the way I looked. I usually wore T-shirts and sweatpants to hide my larger size. But up until then, dieting had never crossed my mind, given I had never been exposed to dieting as a child," said Juliana.

"I can remember the exact day when I decided to lose weight. I had just returned home from school camp, where I had to wear a suit in front of my school peers. I had to take one of the largest sizes. I felt so embarrassed and insecure for having to wear such a tight suit.

"After returning from camp, I jumped on the scales and told myself that I had to lose weight," Juliana said.

Growing increasingly obsessive about her body weight and image, Juliana began to fast intermittently, which soon spiralled into starvation and excessive exercise in a relentless quest to shed weight. In 2008, Juliana was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

"Anorexia nervosa is all about control. It's a mental illness in which you are both scared and proud of what is happening to you.

"When my anorexia nervosa was at its worst, I would cry over food and family meals. I developed an inexplicable fear of sitting, because it meant I couldn't burn calories. I even developed a fear of moisturising in case I absorbed the fatty oils from the cream," said Juliana.

According to Juliana, this "serious mental illness" extends far beyond the concept of being "skinny".

"People think anorexia nervosa is all about food and weight. But it's so much more than that.

"The illness has changed the way my brain works – the way I process thoughts and comments from others," Juliana said.

"Initially, I just wanted to lose weight to become a fantasy version of myself. But once I started to restrict my diet, it soon escalated into a numbers game.

"I was beyond restless. I would wake up at five o'clock in the morning and go to bed at seven o'clock at night. I could never sit down for more than 10 minutes at a time without having to move," said Juliana.



Juliana says her family was left feeling helpless by what was going on. On one occasion, she recalls her sister pulling her in for a hug on her lap, which she knew would involve sitting down, so Juliana shot back up. Her sister told her to “get a life”, as Juliana continued to walk on the spot, in front of her sister.

“I struggled throughout high school. I did gain weight, but I binged, fasted, restricted and compulsively exercised. I just wasn’t aware of the physical damage that I was causing to myself, that I’m aware of now.

“I remember looking up symptoms of hair loss, feeling cold, yellow skin and finding posts on eating disorders frequenting my search engine. That was when I knew I had an eating disorder of some sort,” Juliana said.

“Before then, I’d never thought of myself as someone who would ever develop, or be living with, anorexia nervosa.

“I do suspect my mum thought something was wrong. After reading about eating disorders online for a few weeks, I showed my mum an online post, and asked her to take me to the doctor, who diagnosed me with restrictive type anorexia nervosa,” said Juliana.

“As I continue on my journey of recovery, I recognise it will not be purely linear. Recovery is not a passive process. Sometimes things can be triggered, which will reacquaint you with your eating disorder. But with each episode, I emerge with a healthier outlook on life, and with more responsibility to myself, and my growth.”

Today Juliana is excited to be contributing to the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) – the world’s largest genetic investigation of eating disorders ever performed. The study is aiming to identify the hundreds of genes that influence a person’s risk of developing anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating disorder to improve treatment, and, ultimately, save lives.

“I urge anyone who suspects they, or a loved one may be living with an eating disorder to seek help. Talk to your family, friends or a medical professional, without delay.

“It’s also important for health professionals to be well trained in eating disorders, so that they can help Australians like me, to gain access to the support services and treatments we need,” Juliana said.

Should you suspect that you, or a loved one, may be living with an eating disorder, speak to your local healthcare professional without delay, or head to www.insideoutinstitute.org.au to complete their screener and assessment, and to access more information and professional support.

Australian professional patient support services offering 24/7 helpline services include:

- **Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636**
- **LifeLine: 13 11 14**
- **Men’s Line Australia: 1300 78 99 78**
- **Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800.**

ends#

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Kirsten Bruce, Mel Kheradi and Holly Hamilton Green
VIVA! Communications**

T 02 9968 3741 | 02 9968 1604

M 0401 717 566 | M 0421 551 257 | M 0434 789 839

E kirstenbruce@vivacommunications.com.au

mel@vivacommunications.com.au

holly@vivacommunications.com.au