

## Chantel, 35

### Mum-of-four continuing to mount a recovery from anorexia nervosa, *MELBOURNE*

At 16 years of age, Chantel, now aged 35, Melbourne, was under the expert supervision of a psychologist and a psychiatrist, both of whom were working hard to improve her mental health and wellbeing. However, when Chantel began to visibly shed weight, both clinicians soon realised that another serious mental illness was at play.

Chantel was subsequently handed a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa. For the ensuing four and a half years she battled this potentially devastating illness before learning she was pregnant with her first child. Requiring sufficient energy and stamina to care for her first-born, Chantel knew she had no other choice but to regain weight.

Nowadays, Chantel is mum to four beautiful boys, aged 14, 13, 10 and eight. She is continuing her journey toward mounting a recovery from anorexia nervosa while studying for her Bachelor of Education online and spending her free time with her children, or pursuing arts and crafts.

Chantel is proud to be contributing to the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) study to help improve understanding of the specific genes responsible for anorexia nervosa, and to help shake the stigma associated with eating disorders.

#### **This is Chantel's story.**

Throughout her teens, Chantel developed a fascination with nutrition. Her extensive research on the topic soon began to influence her food choices, resulting in her eliminating certain foods from her diet.

"I equated beauty to being skinny at the time. I thought skinny was what men wanted to see," Chantel said.

Chantel was battling other serious mental health issues when she was subsequently diagnosed with anorexia nervosa by her psychologist and psychiatrist. Her mother, who was morbidly obese at the time, fuelled Chantel's fear of becoming overweight.

For the ensuing four and a half years, Chantel waged an arduous battle with the mental illness, which saw her shed almost half of her body weight.

"My counsellor told my mum that she had to watch me and to monitor was I was eating. To this day, I still don't like people watching me eat.

"I felt happier and more comfortable in my own skin when I reached 45 kilograms. At the weight I am now, I feel dirty and uncomfortable, and that's a psychological battle I continue to face every day," said Chantel.



**more#**

Chantel eventually discovered she was pregnant with her first child. Yearning to give birth to a happy and healthy baby, Chantel knew she had no other choice but to regain weight.

Throughout her battle with anorexia nervosa, Chantel has received invaluable support from her mum and her husband.

“My husband helps me a lot, although I’m not always accepting of his help.

“I still try to avoid sitting at the dinner table to eat with my family, but my husband encourages me to join everyone, and to eat something,” Chantel said.

Chantel has volunteered for 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 have four boys, so if they’re likely to have a predisposition to an eating disorder, it would be beyond helpful to know in advance, to ensure I can provide them with immediate support and access to help,” said Chantel.

Importantly, Chantel urges anyone with symptoms of an eating disorder to reach out for help and to secure a diagnosis as soon as possible.

**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](http://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.**

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**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](mailto:kirstenbruce@vivacommunications.com.au)

[mel@vivacommunications.com.au](mailto:mel@vivacommunications.com.au)

[holly@vivacommunications.com.au](mailto:holly@vivacommunications.com.au)