

## Marie, 25

### Receptionist whose new-found love of Pilates helps her manage her eating disorders, *PERTH*

Receptionist, Marie, 25, Perth has for many years, waged a daily battle with the potentially devastating eating disorders anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Her ongoing struggle with these mental illnesses continues to pervade every aspect of her life, including physically, socially and financially.

Since the age of 20, Marie has been attending weekly psychology sessions. More recently, she has started attending regular dietetic sessions to help manage her disordered eating and maintain accountability for her personal health.

Marie has recently developed a love of Pilates and says it helps her to better manage her eating disorders.

She is sharing her personal story to provide comfort to those in a similar situation.

**This is Marie's story.**

A self-described shy and anxious child with low self-confidence, Marie began to exhibit perfectionist character traits and anxiety throughout her childhood.

Despite showing no signs of disordered eating up until 19 years of age, Marie then resolved to lose weight to fulfil her New Year's resolution. An ensuing string of compliments about her weight loss propelled Marie to shed even more kilos. Her weight loss soon started to spiral out of control.

Concerned by her drastic weight loss and low food consumption, Marie's family encouraged her to seek help from their family GP.

"I felt like my GP initially brushed off the seriousness of my condition. He just told me not to lose any more weight, otherwise I would end up in hospital.

"Although this threat was real, I received no practical help for my illness. In fact, I found it extremely difficult to change anything I was doing. The grip of my eating disorder was just too strong," said Marie.

The dominant negative voice in Marie's head continued to urge her to eliminate foods from her diet and to drown her in guilt if she didn't go to the gym.

After a year of failing to break her cycle of unhealthy eating on her own, Marie, then aged 20, began to attend a weekly psychology session, which included the use of enhanced cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT-E) to support the management of her eating disorder. It was at this point in time, that Marie's psychologist diagnosed her with anorexia nervosa.

Although Marie's CBT-E enabled her to attend university and maintain a job, her illness soon morphed into episodes of bingeing and purging, which led to a diagnosis of bulimia nervosa just before her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.



"I'm convinced that going from extreme food restrictions, to forcing myself to eat as part of my recovery, sparked my bulimic tendencies, while reflecting my inability to cope with the situation at hand," Marie said.

Keeping her disordered eating habit from her family proved extremely challenging for Marie.

"It was a constant nightmare at home. I was trying to conceal any un-eaten food from my family while having non-stop arguments with them as to why I wasn't eating.

"It was the same with my boyfriend. During some of my major setbacks and relapses, we had no relationship, and we would constantly argue, especially about food," said Marie.

Marie, nonetheless, continued her eating disorders therapy and attended an outpatient treatment centre for four-days-a-week to manage her illnesses. It was during this time that she discovered a love for Pilates.

"Pilates helps me to manage my anxiety and keeps me focused for a full 50 minutes, so I have no chance to think about my eating disorder," Marie said.

To further aid her recovery, Marie has since chosen to limit her time on social media to 20 minutes per day. She is also learning to keep herself accountable for her disordered eating and to be more open with her family and boyfriend when experiencing hard times.

Marie 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 really hope EDGI will uncover the genes that predispose a person to developing an eating disorder, because there must be an explanation for why certain people develop eating disorders, while others do not," said Marie.

**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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