

We live in a society that values thinness. You could be life-threateningly ill, you could have just gotten your wisdom teeth out and be on a liquid diet, you could have lost your appetite because you're sad from a breakup, people don't care. If you lose weight, people are going to notice and they're going to tell you just how great you look. But what do we do with the not-so-subtle implication that we looked less great before? And how do we handle it when we gain the weight back, resorting back to that less-great self? This is a cycle I think a lot of people can relate to. Bodies can usually only handle a certain amount of deprivation before they snap and overcompensate, or binge. For those who take it as far as I did, it can result in a lesser-acknowledged eating disorder, called binge eating disorder.

Sometimes when I reflect back, it's like when you watch a horror movie and want to scream "Don't go in there!" I wish I could go back in time and prevent my younger self from starting my first diet. I would say it was when I was fourteen or fifteen. It was around that time that I got sick of the well-meaning comments from family members and going shopping with all my thin friends, only to find that nothing fit me in the changing room. I wasn't obese, but I certainly wasn't a size two who looked good in my school's standard uniform of skinny jeans and Hollister t-shirts. I just wanted to fit in. No, I wanted to be considered beautiful like they were. Motivated by self-loathing, I began to count calories, drink litres of water daily and run obsessively on the treadmill. Within a few months, I was noticeably thinner and had never felt better. People began to notice me. I had attention from the opposite sex for the first time in my life. It was so exciting. Until I couldn't starve myself anymore and I snapped. Soon I found myself consuming thousands of calories in one sitting, my stomach distended and almost crying in pain. And thus began a sequence of events that would continue on for the next 7 years of my life. Deprive, binge, repeat.

In recovery, I have learned this is pretty normal. Binge eating disorder usually comes about from some form of starvation. Your body or mind can't handle being restricted from food and driven by that survival instinct, you begin to eat uncontrollably. While some eating disorder-afflicted purge to combat the weight gain, I never could bring myself to and instead would watch myself balloon gradually.

And I know other people see the weight gain too. I can almost see the judgement in my friends and family's eyes when they have seen me recently. Maybe I'm projecting, maybe they don't care as much as I think. But I seem to sense an air of disappointment or embarrassment. It's uncomfortable, it's the elephant in the room. I have especially noticed a difference when I go out to clubs or bars. Thinness is a currency and it's a currency that if I ever had, I certainly do not have now. Male, female, LGBTQ, doesn't matter, I am ignored or even worse, treated like a second-class citizen. People bump into me and don't say sorry, when they once used to. No one buys me drinks. And it's not that I miss it, but it's just hard to not feel like I'm worth less now. Or even worthless now. I carry the physical weight of my binges around daily, a physical reminder of the emotional weight of all those binges I endured. Even though I have stopped bingeing and have learned to eat intuitively, by my body's demands purely, no weight loss has come about and it's been a struggle to not turn back to diets or excessive exercise.

But it's easier when I remind myself where it will lead me; to boxes of cereal, and loaves of bread, spoonfuls of peanut butter, in dark corners of the kitchen when no one is around to see me. To the burning hot shame, the over fullness of my stomach, the disappointment in myself for losing

control once again. The feeling of bingeing is one of the most terrifying I've ever endured, because you truly lose complete control over your body. This is not "having an extra slice of cake or a second serving you didn't need but still wanted". It's an unconscious frenzied activity, and a coping mechanism. For me, it was a way to ease loneliness, to curb anxiety, to manage depression, to punish myself for eating beyond calorie limits or just because I was so fucking hungry. Food became my everything. And I hated myself through every bite. I would find myself crying through mouthfuls, praying for the will to stop, but no divine intervention ever came.

A year later, well into my recovery process, things are a lot better. I have gone almost three months without a binge and I continue to work on my body image daily. I'm attempting to find peace in exercise without forcing myself to do it, or exercise in ways that I don't really like. It has been scary to give up control and gain weight. To give up bingeing, I needed to give up that control and I'm learning to trust the process.

I hope one day I'll be able to run a half-marathon. I hope I will continue to eat what I want in moderation, refusing to restrict myself, while also honouring my body. That I will always be able to go out for a friend's birthday and share a pitcher of margaritas, and order tacos instead of a salad because that's what I really want. To not fear the bread basket. To learn how to balance that out without being crazy and obsessed. Eating purely for fuel and enjoyment, and continuing on with my day.

I don't know where my journey will go from here. I would be lying if I said I don't hope that I will lose weight. I hope my body will forgive me for the years of abuse I bestowed on it, when it was just trying to keep me alive. I'm not complacent in my struggle. I know eating disorder recovery takes a long time, and I still fight overeating regularly.

I know if a lot of people in my life found out I had an eating disorder, they straight up wouldn't believe me. I look nothing like the image our society associates with the illness. I don't have a thigh gap, I have never in my life worn a size zero and at my worst, people thought I looked healthy not skeletal. Sometimes I feel like I failed at an eating disorder because of my diagnosis. It is a symptom of my screwed-up mind, but it's still difficult not to feel like I failed at starving myself. That I wasn't strong enough. But then my rational brain asks me, should I really be upset that I failed at a disease that would have slowly killed me, beating me down emotionally and physically? And so this is where I have settled, choosing to be a bit heavier and mentally happy.