

Supporting the mental health of people living with obesity

Natalie is a 32 year old single woman, living in a shared apartment with her friend Megan.

Natalie lived in a household with a mother who was constantly dieting. Growing up, Natalie considered herself to be chubby and always admired her mother for her slender body and restraint with eating. There was a heavy focus on 'looking good' in the household, and with two sisters, one younger and one older, Natalie always felt like the odd one out. Natalie's mother only ate one meal per day. She spent the first half of the day drinking several cups of tea and only taking bites here and there. Natalie's mother would criticise her own body and was unable to appreciate it, despite being in the healthy weight range. Natalie felt that her body differed from her mother's body and those around her.

Natalie was 17 years old when she went on her first diet. Her mother sat her down and they talked about the different types of diets that were popular at the time, before choosing one. Natalie's mother was very happy that Natalie wanted to do something about her weight problem. It wasn't long before Natalie had tried several diets. Some led to short term weight loss, before she eventually gained the weight back, plus some extra. Increasingly, Natalie felt like a failure and out of control around food.

After moving out of home at 24, Natalie decided that this was it and she was going to finally lose weight. She moved into a share house with a new friend Megan. Megan was very health conscious and only ate clean foods. Natalie thought that this was going to be a marvellous start to her new life. It wasn't too long before they were sautéing kale in coconut oil and snapping pictures for Instagram together. Natalie was happier than ever and started to get compliments about how good she looked at a lower weight. Each time she posted a photo on social media, she noticed that she got more likes and comments. It felt good so she knew she was doing the right thing. Natalie started to fear gaining back the weight and dreaded social circumstances where she was unable to eat clean foods.

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Natalie began a job as a personal assistant and was often expected to work overtime, bringing her average weekly hours to around 60. Natalie was run down, tired, stressed and started to succumb to the ever present office treats. Natalie knew that they were 'bad foods' and each time she put one of these options into her mouth she would feel a pang of guilt and disappointment. She would often take these foods and eat them in the stairwell, as she worried that people would comment. Natalie felt the familiar, overwhelming feeling of being out of control and the sense of not being able to stop until it was all gone. Natalie had foods flying around and around in her head. She would eat the food uncontrollably and feel the overwhelming feelings of guilt and failure. Natalie's weight increased higher than ever and with each increase on the scales the more and more out of control she felt. All that she could think about was food. She was exhausted! (She researched on the internet about BMI and calculated hers at 32).

Natalie felt that this way of eating couldn't go on any longer. She even contemplated vomiting but just couldn't bring herself to do it. Natalie feared eating in public and started to decline engagements with friends when food was involved. She eventually found it challenging to leave the house. Megan noticed the decline in her mood and suggested that she start coming with her to the gym, but Natalie feared that she would receive judgement about her body there. Although Natalie knew that Megan meant well, Natalie yelled at Megan about how unhelpful she was being. On reflection, Natalie noticed how irrational she was, and she worried that she had ruined their relationship. Natalie had been restricting her food and binge eating for 8 months and her weight was higher than ever.

Natalie sees an advertisement on TV about bariatric surgery, and also medication to help her lose weight that is prescribed by a GP. She knows that she needs help. After struggling for years with her weight, and recently discovering that her BMI puts her in the category of obese, Natalie makes an appointment to see a GP about surgery or medication options.