

## **Jack's Story** *submitted by Jack*

It seems strange looking back, but I remember seeing a documentary on TV about eating disorders and thinking "how strange?". I couldn't understand why someone would do that.

I guess you could say that I was more than a little naive.

My name is Jack and I suffered with Bulimia Nervosa for over 3 years.

Men do suffer with eating disorders, I am living proof. Looking around in the media you wouldn't know that. Most documentaries, magazine articles, online communities and support groups tend to heavily female oriented. Which is a shame. As being a male with an eating disorder can be a very lonely experience. It is just hard to know where you fit in. It's not something you can discuss with your male friends. You would never bring it up at the pub on a Friday night. Sadly other men just don't understand. To be honest, I found it hard enough to understand what I was going through.

That's the thing. My eating disorder somewhat came out of the blue. I didn't have a troubled childhood and as far as I am aware there were no dark secrets hiding in my past. I was a typical normal healthy guy. My only mistake was to decide to go on a diet to lose the few pounds I had gained during university.

I tend to be successful at most areas of my life, so I was determined to be successful at dieting. That meant when the lonely sinking feeling of hunger and deprivation kicked in I just ignored it. That meant when I got so hungry I started having food dreams I kept going. That meant when I hit the eventually weight loss plateau and I stopped losing weight, I didn't give up.

The rebound was inevitable.

One day at work a colleague brought in a box of pasties and buns. I told myself to have just one. They tasted so good. I couldn't resist. I quickly devoured five of them. I felt sick, queasy, guilty. I started to panic. Literally, as though I was having a panic attack. I ran to the toilets and got rid of it all.

So began my life with my eating disorder.

I promised myself I would never do it again, but as I still continued to restrict my food intake my body continued to starve so I was still prone to massive urges to binge on food. Eventually I would give in and binge which would always lead to a purge. Over time it became stronger and more frequent. I began to wonder if there was something deeply wrong with me. I wondered why I couldn't be normal around food. I was constantly exhausted, stressed and moody. I would pretend to everyone to be this happy-go-lucky guy, but deep down I was a miserable, scared, confused little boy. After a particularly bad episode of binging and purging I realized that this had to stop. I couldn't do this alone. I needed help. So I made an appointment to see my doctor. I was so terrified and anxious. I had never spoken to anyone about my eating disorder before. I broke down and confessed everything. I immediately I felt a huge weight lift off my shoulders.

I was referred to a local therapist who was extremely supportive and understanding. She became my anchor throughout my recovery. I also plucked up the courage to join an online recovery community. Immediately I found other men having similar experiences as me. All of a sudden I was no longer alone anymore. For the first time in a long time I felt hope.

Encouraged and supported, I became determined to finally put my eating disorder behind me. I was put on a structured eating program, which at first was extremely challenging, but bit by bit, day by day, it got easier.

I confessed everything to my parents. I couldn't lie to them any longer. At first they were shocked and surprised (again being male didn't help here)! But in time they became very supportive.

My recovery from bulimia had many bumps on the road. I had relapses, mood swings, anxiety attacks, bloating and weight fluctuations. Some days were really tough and without my support team behind me I'm not sure if I would have made it through. My recovery was gradual and at times it's painful. It was full of ups and downs but in the end I realized that the harder times are the ones you learn the most from.

In time my old personality started to reappear. I felt clearer, like a fog had been lifted. I was calmer, less anxious and more comfortable in my own skin than I had been in years. One day I accidentally caught myself singing out loud. Wait a second, am I singing? Was that happiness I was feeling???

In time my old hunger sensations came back too. I then learned to use my hunger as a guide to tell me how much food I should eat that was right for me. Not too much, not too little. It made a nice change from stressing over the calorie content of a rice cake.

I never thought it would happen, but eventually food became just food. Nothing more. I felt free. My recovery took around 14 months and my only regret is not seeking help sooner. I was too embarrassed to admit to anyone that I was suffering. I guess being a man only made me more embarrassed.

If anyone is reading this, don't let fear, embarrassment or being ashamed hold you back from seeking recovery.

We all need help sometimes (yes, even men are allowed to ask for help).

Right now, for the first time in a long time the future is bright. Each day is a new adventure and I want to make up for the years I lost to bulimia. I've kept a blog throughout my recovery journey, which you can view here: <http://www.bulimiahelp.org/blog/jack> . It's trigger free and I hope you find it inspirational.

Recovery is possible, just make sure you get the support you need!