

Look at me now

I starved myself until I was 4st 5lb

Grief was the trigger when Lorna Jones, 23, stopped eating – and it nearly proved fatal

You could have cut the tension with a knife. Mum glared across the table as I played with my food. I lifted a spoonful of stew to my mouth but my throat was dry, my hand shook and my eyes watered. It was as if my body was saying, 'Don't do it!' My battle with food had taken over my life, and there was nothing anyone could do to make me eat.

At 4ft 10in, I'd weighed 8st 7lb. I was a happy, healthy size 12, too busy enjoying

life to worry about what I looked like. But that changed when my grandad died.

I was only 20 and he was the first person I'd lost. I didn't know how to grieve and I started to feel very isolated.

I threw myself into housework. Getting practical jobs done helped me feel as if I was in control again. So I took over the ironing, the cleaning and the cooking.

Gradually, my urge to be in control spilled over into what I ate. I cut back on my portions until I'd replaced my usual cereal and toast for breakfast with just two teaspoons of cereal.

Lunch had been a chunky sandwich and crisps. Now I'd eat a bag of microwave veg. I started to throw out the carrots and the sweetcorn, leaving a few peas.

Instead of spaghetti bolognese for tea, I ate just three teaspoons of beans on toast. As the weight dropped off me, Mum got upset, saying, 'Why can't you eat?' But I couldn't see I had a problem.

By the time I turned 21, I was down to 6st. I finally felt in control. The more weight I lost, the better I felt.

I just couldn't stop. I began to exercise madly. I'd get up at 5am to ride my bike for six miles before breakfast. If I didn't

Denial

'My periods stopped and my hair fell out. I was hurting myself but couldn't admit it'

do it, I felt fat and ugly. I got so thin that the wind blew me off my bike a few times.

During the day, I ensured I was too busy to eat. I worked as a cashier for Matalan and hid my measly lunch from my colleagues. Back home, I cut off all my friends, stayed in and did the housework. Anything not to think about food.

I honestly didn't realise how much I'd changed. I clammed up and walked around like a zombie. My periods



With Mum: 'I'm so glad I'm still alive'

stopped and my hair came out in clumps. But still I wouldn't listen to my family's pleas to get help.

I was so thin I could fit into clothes for an eight-year-old. I was a bag of bones, constantly cold. Even in summer, I had to wear about five layers to keep warm.

The turning point came months later. Desperate, Mum took me to hospital because my legs had swollen up.

I'd lost nearly half my body weight and weighed 4st 5lb. The doctor told Mum, 'Lorna's anorexic. If you don't get help for her, she'll die.'

I was referred to a privately run eating disorders unit for NHS patients at Cheadle Royal Hospital, Cheshire. My first night at Cheadle, I was too weak to move, still refusing to eat. A nurse picked me up and sat me on a chair in front of my food.

As I sat with my head in my hands, crying and yelling, the nurses gently talked me round. I ate a portion of ham dauphinoise, salad, and custard for pudding – the first proper meal I'd had in more than a year.

The reality of what I'd done to my body frightened me. My eyes bulged, my bones stuck out. As I put on weight, I was made to go swimming in a bikini. That was really tough, but I did it.

Counselling helped, and I started talking about Grandad's death. I finally let myself cry,

which really helped. I came home after three months. Now, a year on, I weigh 8st, and I look forward to mealtimes.

It's been a long, painful process. I still can't accept how close to death I was, but now I'm so glad I'm here with the people who love me.

For help with eating disorders, visit www.recovery.org.uk, or www.anorexiabulimiacare.co.uk

What triggers anorexia?

Anorexia often goes hand in hand with low self-esteem and poor body image, but the disease has many triggers.

- **Ally McBeal star Calista Flockhart went down to 7st. 'I was seriously stressed. I was working 15-hour days on the set.'**

- **Ex-Corrie star Tracy Shaw was 21 when she became ill. 'The mother of a dancing partner said, 'Look at your fat bum.' I started dieting. It spiralled into anorexia... If I ate a piece of orange, I'd jog on the spot for hours to burn it off.'**



Calista was stressed out

Pain

Lorna's illness started after her beloved grandad died. 'I needed to feel in control'

