# Battling anorexia

Ava Manning 03.09.2021 73 Views 0 Comments Health, News
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Hayley Schnae looks in a mirror. Ava Manning | The Argonaut

Hayley Schnae, a previous master's of science student at the University of Idaho, was hospitalized with anorexia nervosa when she was just 13 years old.

"I started dieting around the end of sixth grade because I just wanted to lose a few pounds," Schnae said. "I just wanted to thin out a little bit."

At that point, she didn't even know what eating disorders were.

Roughly 30 million Americans struggle with an eating disorder at some point in their lifetime, according to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders.



"It started spiraling," Schnae said. I started cutting out certain foods, eating less and working out more. I thought if I cut back on a little more food, I'd see results a lot more quickly."

According to Cassandra Partridge, a senior research specialist at UI and a registered dietician nutritionist, eating disorders can be influenced by the media and feelings about body image.

"Elementary school girls are coming into contact with that," Partridge said. "We have to start promoting a positive body image and a positive relationship with food at a young age."

Schnae's restrictive eating habits continued to worsen as she cut out more foods. As a member of her school's swim team, Schnae wasn't easting enough to compensate for the work she was putting in. Her weight began dropping faster, and it wasn't long before her parents voiced their concerns.

"Before I had started dieting, I weighed about 103 pounds," Schnae said. "At that point, I weighed about 83 pounds."

A bathroom scale. Ava Manning | The Argonaut

Schnae's parents made her an appointment to be evaluated, but the doctor didn't think she had an eating disorder. He ran some blood tests and said everything came back normal.

"After the doctor's appointment, I continued losing weight," Schnae said. "I was already pale, but I was beginning to have this weird grey hue to me. I was dizzy all the time and couldn't move around too much because if I stood up, I would nearly pass out."

As Schnae's eating disorder progressed, her parents received a call one afternoon from the school nurse. Schnae had fainted in her seventh-grade gym class.

"My parents sat me down and said they were forcing me to go to the hospital because of how bad I had gotten," said Schnae.

According to the National Organization for Women, roughly 50% of elementary school girls are concerned with their weight or already worried they are "too fat."

When Schnae checked into the hospital, they weighed her. She'd lost another eight pounds.

"It was a really uncomfortable experience," Schnae said. "When I saw the scale at 75 pounds – it really freaked me out. I never meant to get that low."

The nurses took her vitals and gave her a feeding tube. When they tried to get her temperature, it was so low they had to wrap her in blankets.

Schnae was required to raise her vitals to a healthier level before being transferred to Rogers Behavioral Health, a specialty facility located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she stayed for about a month. Schnae still remembers her first night there.

"The food they put in front of me was macaroni and cheese," said Schnae. "As a kid it was my favorite meal, but at that point it was the scariest thing."

While Schnae is thankful for the wonderful team of doctors and nurses who helped her along the way, she credits most of her recovery to strong-willed perseverance.

"I was very adamant about getting better," Schnae said. "That's what helped me get through treatment."

Partridge is an avid supporter of intuitive eating, a form of eating through instinct, emotion, and rational thought, first advocated by dietitians Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch in 1995.

"It's a way of eating that brings awareness to your hunger and fullness," Partridge said. "Food is more than just energy, it's associated with our emotions, interactions and memories."

Partridge is also interested in eating disorder prevention methods that have been rising in popularity.

"There are prevention programs for eating disorders that seem to have really good results," Partridge said. "What's interesting is that there's not as much focus on what an eating disorder is, but instead on encouraging healthy attitudes towards foods, dieting, and body image early on."

Calorie counting list. Ava Manning | The Argonaut

One of the reasons that Partridge is so passionate about raising awareness and finding prevention methods is due to her own battle with an eating disorder. She developed an eating disorder in high school but was able to get the help she needed to recover.

"If you have an eating disorder or disordered behaviors, you need a team of medical professionals who can support you," Partridge said. "I was lucky enough to have just that."

After getting out of the hospital, Schnae began going to therapy sessions. Having a supportive team of medical professionals was a crucial part of her recovery.

Even with help, it's still common to relapse at some point, according to the National Eating Disorders Collaboration.

"I relapsed my freshman year of college," said Schnae. "I used binging and purging as a way of comfort. It would be an intense pain, and then it would be an extreme numbness afterwards. I wanted that numbness."

The summer after her relapse, Schnae recieved help from family and friends and was able to get her eating disorder back under control. She hasn't consistently dealt with anorexia since. But the disorder left its mark.

Schnae now struggles with depression and anxiety, something she didn't experience before anorexia.

"Having an eating disorder is like going to war with yourself," Schnae said. "You're constantly fighting your instinct to eat. Other people can be there to support and help guide you, but it all depends on how motivated you are. I think that has made me a much stronger person."

Vandal Health recently hosted an event called the Body Project on Zoom. The National Eating Disorder Association trained UI graduate student Tia Ogus as a facilitator for the event. "This whole project is aimed at increasing body positivity," Ogus said. "I think it's an excellent course that women can really benefit from."

Other resources can be found on the Vandal Health website. UI's Counseling and Testing Center offers free counseling and low-cost testing for students. Individuals can also book an appointment with a dietician at Gritman Medical Center.

The Women's Center on campus is a safe space for anyone in need, with resources and guidance available. Many people, particularly women, struggle with body image. Lysa Salsbury, director of the Women's Center, is advocating to abolish this stigma.

"There is really a lot of stigma in our society," Salsbury said. "We really need to push back against that and promote the reality that people exist in different shapes and sizes."

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About the Author

Junior at the University of Idaho, majoring in English. I work for the Argonaut as a journalist as well as a photographer for Sports and News.

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