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Health & Fitness

Bulimics on Bulimia
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> *I decided to eat a graham cracker, just one, then two, three, four, the whole box, went back to the cupboard, macaroni and cheese, ravioli, cereal, an entire can of frosting, cake mix, to the fridge, milk, ice cream, cheese. I just kept going and going, eat, run to the bathroom, [throw up], do it all again. [Within] just a few hours of being home, I'd managed to eat everything in the house.*

This is a glimpse of one girl's reality as she writes of her struggle with the eating disorder known as bulimia. Hers is one of nineteen voices describing life with the disorder, which is characterized by binge eating, followed by getting rid of, or "purging," the unwanted food by either self-induced vomiting or fasting and excessive exercise.

Though each story is unique in its personal details, there are certain similarities that run throughout. Adolescence and puberty are quite often the jumping off point, and depression and obsession with body weight are evident.

Stavrou, who has a degree in psychology and lives in London, compiled the writings to give insight into what life is like for those currently living with bulimia. Mental health professionals, such as counselors and psychologists working with patients with this condition, will benefit from the information; the book will also resonate with those who have suffered or are suffering from such a disorder.

It may also serve as a cautionary tale to general readers, as one writer describes her vomiting ritual: "Tears are streaming down your face. You can barely breathe because your hand is permanently down your throat. Your hand is sore, maybe some cuts on your finger, often blood vessels burst in your eye. Acid burns your esophagus, throat, mouth, and hand."

Others mention the damage done to the enamel on their teeth after years of purging,

sometimes several times a day. There's also damage to their souls.

Though there's not a single answer to why this disorder develops, one writer (in a chapter entitled, "I Want to be Like You") explains: "Food represents all the treats you have denied yourself and all the bad things that have happened. Eat them and enjoy them, but throw them up and get rid of them."

Some of the writers believe they're getting better—but, sadly, are "also very aware it's unlikely that we will ever think of food in a normal way again."