Cate, 41
PE teacher, author and mother-of-three shares her marathon battle with anorexia nervosa, Melbourne

Living with anorexia nervosa and EDNOS for 19 years has left Cate with huge emotional and psychological issues. She suffers from an ongoing heart condition, and lives with anxiety.

When Cate, isn’t busy educating her students on the importance of living a healthy life, she’s either spending time with her husband and three daughters, or sharing her experience of eating disorders through writing, reaching out to those facing the illness that has weighed her down for years.

Now, the fully recovered 41 year old has co-authored three books tailored to those living with, or hoping to recover from an eating disorder. This is her story.

“To me, anorexia nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening illness.

“The illness has had serious repercussions on my health. During my illness I had very bad, untreated anxiety. I have problems with my memory, I can be easily confused and have ongoing heart problems,” said Cate.

Cate lived with some form of an eating disorder between 18-to-37 years of age, without ever fully confronting her illness.

“Not ever having faced recovery before, facing it at 37 was confronting,” Cate said.

Cate maintains she was genetically predisposed to anorexia nervosa, and says even though she was facing challenges when initially developing the illness, she is positive there is a genetic link.

“Everyone faces challenges and goes through hardships in life, but not everyone starves themselves as a result,” said Cate.

Cate speaks from her personal, excruciatingly long experience of battling the illness.

“Anorexia nervosa came and went, and even transitioned into different forms for 19 years. But it was the worst it ever was the last time I had it,” Cate said.

Although nursing habits of the illness prior to falling pregnant with her youngest daughter, now five, she managed to fall pregnant and maintain a healthy weight throughout her pregnancy.

“As soon as I gave birth, I started refusing meals. But I did so in a way in which it went unnoticed.
“According to my psychologist, I’ve made an Olympic event out of hiding things,” said Cate. Cate was living with post natal depression and anorexia nervosa post-birth of her third daughter.

A maternal health nurse identified Cate’s symptoms and helped kick-start her on the road to recovery.

“I was completely ignoring my GP to start with. It wasn’t socially acceptable to have this mental illness, and it felt like I was giving people the right to comment on my personality.

“When I was diagnosed, I found myself lost in a world that saw eating disorders as the purview of teenage girls. Period. Cue my first experience with the stigma of being an adult with an eating disorder. Also cue my first experience of being devastatingly ashamed,” Cate said.

Cate’s family and friends would describe her as being exceptionally fit, and naturally slim. This is why no one commented or noticed Cate was living with anorexia nervosa and EDNOS for so long.

“However, my siblings and friends were nothing but supportive throughout my recovery process,” Cate said.

Although Cate is fully recovered from anorexia nervosa, she hasn’t emerged unscathed.

“I’m quite traumatised by the experience. Certain situations and thoughts, such as going back to the gym, a smell or a song can trigger my anxiety.

“My last relapse was just so traumatic. At the time, it was a terminal illness in my mind. I believed I was going to die,” said Cate.

Cate is anxiously awaiting the results of the Anorexia Nervosa Genetics Initiative (ANGI) research study, in which she has enrolled.

“If they’re able to identify genes or markers to anorexia nervosa, it will be fantastic for breaking down the stigma, as they would be able to point it to biology, along with finding better treatments and potentially a cure.

“The study findings will certainly help people who are genetically predisposed to the illness. In the long-term, there is potential for screening and early detection, it would be brilliant,” Cate said.

Cate wishes to see an end to the trivialisation of eating disorders.

“I get annoyed seeing people write articles about ways to prevent eating disorders in their daughters, or claiming anorexia nervosa is all about vanity,” said Cate.

“It is just so far from the truth. If you talk to anyone with an eating disorder, you’d realise they aren’t doing it to fit in, and see it’s a response to a trigger, that is different from the way most people’s response to that same trigger may be.”
For more information, or to coordinate an interview with Cate, please contact Kirsten Bruce, Mark Henderson or Claire Wright from VIVA! Communications on 0401 717 566 / 0431 465 004 / 0467 415 617.