Laura, 28
Communications professional & bride-to-be in full recovery from anorexia nervosa, Perth

When PR and communications professional, Laura, 28, Perth, isn’t planning her upcoming wedding, she’s either busy at work, or spending time with her family, friends and fiancé.

Laura’s current life however, is a far cry from the troublesome days she spent transitioning from high school to university, during which she developed anorexia nervosa.

Laura attributes her longstanding insecurity about her appearance and high-achieving personality to heightening her susceptibility to anorexia nervosa.

Now fully recovered, she enjoys a thriving career, working for a not-for-profit organisation that provides in-home health and care across Australia.

This is her story.

“To me, anorexia nervosa is a mental illness which, unfortunately, a lot of people don’t realise.

“Not eating is a side-effect of the psychological state,” Laura said.

Laura developed anorexia nervosa at the age of 19, at a time of much uncertainty in her life. After graduating from high school and experiencing relationship issues, Laura developed an obsession with not eating.

Laura obsessed over everything she ate, measuring every calorie to ensure the smallest intake of food possible. When her mum invited her to lunch, Laura would take her own food, proof of how the disease pervaded her day-to-day life.

Anorexia nervosa has taken a significant social, psychological and physical toll on Laura.

“I lost touch with all of my school friends, as socialising usually meant calorie intake.

“And as for the physical implications, they were massive. I experienced low bone density, stress fractures from excessive exercise, loss of hair and stomach problems, which is an ongoing issue today,” said Laura.

Laura recalls the recovery process being very slow – literally one-step-at-a-time.

“It was like learning how to eat all over again.”

It wasn’t Laura’s choice to seek help. It was her mother who was adamant that Laura visit a doctor, and as her recovery progressed, she became Laura’s rock.

“My mum made me go to the doctor, who then referred me to a psychologist and dietitian. While the psychologist helped me with my mental state, the dietitian started to work with me on my diet.
“However things didn’t improve straight away, because it took me a while in my own mind to want to get better,” Laura said.

“I wasn’t ready to let go of the control I had during my illness.”

It took Laura about six months to commit to recovering. At this turning point, she weighed less than 39kg and was told that losing one more kilo would mean admission to hospital.

“When I realised how severe my anorexia nervosa was, I wanted to get better. I didn’t want to be forced to eat in hospital. However there was a fine line between wanting to get better and wanting to gain weight,” said Laura.

Laura gives her mother full credit for her recovery, citing “I can’t even describe the amount of patience my mum demonstrated. If it wasn’t for her, I honestly don’t know where I’d be today.”

Although Laura has overcome her illness and is now fit and healthy, there remains part of her that still wants to lose weight.

“I always say I want to lose weight, but I can’t see myself taking the steps to starving myself again.

“I’m very cautious of what I eat, and know a lot about food, as I took so much time analysing each and every nutrition label on food packaging during my illness,” Laura said.

Since recovering from anorexia nervosa, Laura has developed a new-found love for food.

“These days, I really like going to restaurants and enjoy cooking.”

Laura is participating in the Anorexia Nervosa Genetics Initiative (ANGI) research study to help those who are living with, and have lived with anorexia nervosa, as well as those who may be predisposed to the illness.

“Although I live in hope, I’m not entirely convinced mental illness is preventable.

“But because I have personally experienced anorexia nervosa, I’m always supportive of new initiatives to help prevent others from developing the illness,” said Laura.

Laura is adamant her personality made her susceptible to developing anorexia nervosa and therefore maintains genetics do play a role in the development of anorexia nervosa.

“I believe people with certain personality types are predisposed to developing anorexia nervosa. So I suppose the link lies somewhere there.

“If your personality does predispose you, then the illness is not a lifestyle choice, which is a common misunderstanding,” Laura said.

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For more information, or to coordinate an interview with Laura, please contact Kirsten Bruce, Mark Henderson or Claire Wright from VIVA! Communications on 0401 717 566/ 0431 465 004/ 0467 415 617.