

# COSMOPOLITAN

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WHAT YOU'RE DYING TO KNOW ABOUT

## When a Diet Turns Deadly

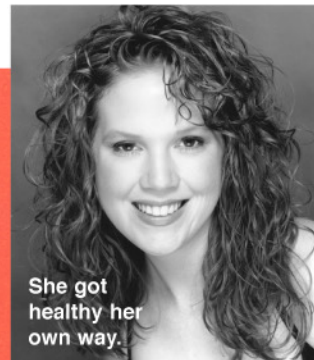
The number of young women suffering from eating disorders continues to rise. *Cosmo* examines the causes of this epidemic and the new cures being offered.

By Celeste Perron

■ When Mary-Kate Olsen checked into an eating-disorder treatment center this past summer to seek help for anorexia, it sharpened our society's already intense focus on young women and weight. "We're obsessed with food, weight, and dieting, and young women are under particular pressure to be thin," says William Davis, PhD, the director of research for the Renfrew Center, a treatment facility with branches throughout the country. So it's no surprise that millions of American girls have serious body-image issues. But why does a quest to lose a few pounds turn into a life-threatening sickness? Doctors don't know for sure, but they're working hard to understand the causes of eating disorders and come up with cures. And they can't make those discoveries quickly enough, considering that the number of people suffering from anorexia, bulimia, and similar disorders has ballooned in the past 20 years and, say experts, it's climbing every year.

### "THE WEIRD WAY I RECOVERED"

Country singer Jenni Schaefer, 28, wrote a book, *Life Without Ed*, about how she beat anorexia and bulimia.



She got healthy her own way.

#### Q TELL US ABOUT HOW YOU COPEDED WITH YOUR EATING DISORDER.

**A** Rather than thinking about it as an illness, I viewed my eating disorder as an abusive boyfriend and then broke up with him. I named him Ed (an acronym for eating disorder) and made it my goal to give this negative guy the boot. If a critical remark about my body popped into my head, I would perceive it as just another cruddy comment from Ed and brush it off.

#### Q HOW ARE EATING DISORDERS LIKE BAD BOYFRIENDS?

**A** A bad boyfriend will do anything to control you. An eating disorder does the same thing. It demands to have say over everything you do, whether it's what you eat for dinner or how many miles you run.

#### Q WHY DID YOUR METHOD WORK BETTER THAN OTHER TYPES OF TREATMENT?

**A** A lot of books about anorexia and bulimia advise going back to your childhood to try to figure out why the issue developed, but they lack concrete strategies for dealing with those times when you want to avoid food. But with the Ed technique, I had tactics I could use to get myself to eat. If I wanted to skip a meal, I reminded myself that those harmful impulses came from Ed, and I

didn't have to listen to him. After that, I was able to align myself with others to team up against him. To get through dinner, I'd give someone a call or dine with friends to feel like I had pals on my side and Ed wasn't important.

#### Q WHAT DO YOU HOPE OTHER WOMEN WITH BODY-IMAGE ISSUES WILL LEARN FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE?

**A** A woman with an eating disorder thinks she's the one person who can't get better. I hope my story will show them recovery is possible. I've been overwhelmed by e-mails from people who've succeeded using my technique. Since so many women have been in unhealthy relationships, it's a concept they understand.

#### Q WHAT FINALLY MOTIVATED YOU TO CHANGE?

**A** I knew I needed help when I didn't even have the energy to sing or write songs because I was constantly starving myself.

#### Q DO YOU STILL STRUGGLE WITH BODY ISSUES?

**A** Sometimes I hear Ed's voice when I look in the mirror, telling me that my legs look huge so I better not eat that day. But now, instead of following his orders, I simply view Ed as an annoying commentator in my head. I know those thoughts are just plain crazy, and I don't let them make me miserable anymore.