

# Don't Settle for Almost Recovered

EXCERPT FROM *ALMOST ANOREXIC*, BY JENNIFER J. THOMAS, PH.D., HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL, AND JENNI SCHAEFER

During the recovery process from either almost anorexia or a full-blown eating disorder, you may notice that you reach certain plateaus. Maybe you finally stop bingeing, which is a triumph, but you are restricting more than ever—a problem that many people don't like to admit. Or possibly you finally are eating enough, but now you experience intense feelings of fatness. During these times, it is crucial to pat yourself on the back and acknowledge how far you have come. But it is equally important to recognize that you still have some room to grow. In a longitudinal study conducted by clinical psychologist Kamryn Eddy and colleagues, many women with an intake diagnosis of anorexia or bulimia nervosa recovered during the nine-year follow-up period. However, the transition was rarely black-and-white; more than three quarters exhibited subclinical eating disorders at some point during the study.<sup>1</sup>

The question ultimately becomes “How free do you want to be?” You don't have to settle for lingering eating-disordered thoughts and attitudes. With time, patience, and continued growth, you can ultimately reach a place where you don't even hear Ed anymore. Jenni often compares her personal Ed to a muscle: When she engaged Ed and obeyed him, he grew bigger and stronger. But when she stopped listening and began to trust herself, Ed atrophied like a muscle that wasn't getting used. Essentially, her eating disorder wasted away slowly, just like her calf muscle had when she broke her foot.

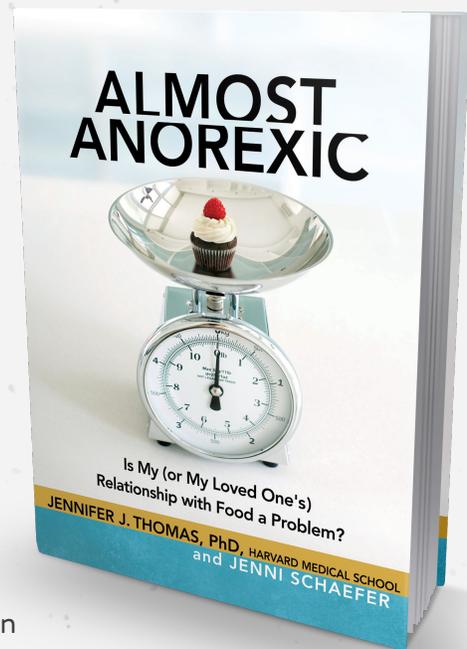
When Jenni's eating disorder “muscle” was atrophying, it wasn't uncommon for a conversation with Ed to sound something like this:

**Ed:** You need to lose a few pounds.

**Jenni:**

**Ed:** Let's go to the store and binge like old times. Jenni:

**Ed:** Earth to Jenni—are you still there?



Yes, you got it: these were not really conversations at all. Eventually, Jenni reached a point where she simply ignored Ed. The more she was able to do this, the less he spoke. In time, he stopped talking altogether....

## NEVER, NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP

Don't sell yourself short by getting halfway or even three quarters of the way better. Push past the various versions of "pseudorecovery"<sup>19</sup> to a complete one. It might be tempting, but try not to settle for even 99 percent better. Sure, we have heard people argue that they can survive in an almost-recovered phase, so why move further? And that might be true. But surviving and truly living are two different things.

You might be wondering how you will know when you are fully recovered. Hindsight often tells people when they are better, so try not to worry about exactly where you are along the way. Jenni, for instance, did not realize that she was fully recovered until friends and family started pointing it out. If your loved one is struggling, you can be a mirror like this reflecting what you see, especially in terms of progress. When Jenni looked back at her life, she realized that she had been through many stressful periods without turning to eating-disordered behaviors (or even thinking about it). She discovered that she had formed genuine friendships and was living a joyful life. That's recovered. We have connected with countless men and women who have found this place of contentment and health. You can get there too.

## "FULLY RECOVERED" VS. "BARELY RECOVERED"

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1. K. T. Eddy, S. A. Swanson, R. D. Crosby, D. L. Franko, S. Engel, and D. B. Herzog, "How Should DSM-V Classify Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) Presentations in Women with Lifetime Anorexia or Bulimia Nervosa?" *Psychological Medicine* 40 (2010): 1735-44.

19. A. Keski-Rahkonen and F. Tozzi, "The Process of Recovery in Eating Disorder Sufferers' Own Words: An Internet-Based Study," *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 37 (2005): S80-86.

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Jenni Schaefer is a singer/songwriter, speaker, and author of *Life Without Ed* and *Goodbye Ed, Hello Me*. Connect at [Twitter.com/JenniSchaefer](https://twitter.com/JenniSchaefer) and [Facebook.com/LifeWithoutEd](https://facebook.com/LifeWithoutEd). **This handout is downloadable at [JenniSchaefer.com](http://JenniSchaefer.com).**

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