

Claireabelle, 27

Bride to be, nanny & social influencer who has experienced a trifecta of eating disorders, *TIMARU*

Nanny and social influencer, Claireabelle, 27, Timaru, has struggled with her body image and relationship with food from a very young age.

At the age of 12, she was already six-foot-tall and was perpetually bullied for looking different to other girls her age. In a bid to fit in with her peers, Claireabelle began to severely restrict her eating, a battle she continued to wage throughout her teen years. Just before her twentieth birthday, Claireabelle was clinically diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

With treatment, Claireabelle was able to manage her anorexia, however an abusive relationship triggered a relapse of her eating disorder on another two subsequent occasions. Two years later, she started to develop bingeing and purging tendencies, and Claireabelle was formally diagnosed with bulimia nervosa. Claireabelle likens eating disorders to an addiction, whereby her entire world revolved around food and how to hide it. She experienced significant anxiety with regard to locating a toilet in order to purge straight after eating a meal.



Her bingeing and purging tendencies soon turned into episodes of binge-eating and social isolation as her body weight escalated dramatically, reaching 160 kilograms at its peak. At the age of 25, a psychologist diagnosed Claireabelle with binge-eating disorder.

Through many hours spent with her psychiatrist, Claireabelle is now armed with the tools to manage the triggers for her eating disorder. Claireabelle has not required treatment for more than a year now, and currently works as a nanny to three young children. She has over 23,000 followers on her Instagram account, and is passionate about sharing her experiences with binge-eating disorder.

Claireabelle is a strong advocate for the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) New Zealand, which aims to identify the genes that predispose people to developing an eating disorder. She strongly believes this study will provide essential information to contribute to future research on improving treatment for eating disorders.

This is Claireabelle's story.

As a child, Claireabelle was always much taller than her peers, reaching six feet in height at just 12 years of age. Due to her tall stature, she was frequently bullied at school, which triggered her desire to fit in. She began to severely restrict her eating as a teenager and to drastically reduce her body weight.

Claireabelle's eating disorder continued throughout her teens. Her family, with no prior experience of an eating disorder, failed to understand Claireabelle's situation, and were often frustrated with her unhealthy habits. Their lack of understanding of her eating disorder served to frequently trigger Claireabelle's illness.

Just before her twentieth birthday, Claireabelle sought the help of the psychiatric team at her local hospital, where she was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. She began treatment for her illness with a psychiatrist, which managed to keep her eating disorder under control for a brief period of time.

During her early twenties, however, Claireabelle was involved in an abusive relationship, which triggered a shift in her disordered eating.

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Claireabelle began bingeing on food and then purging to compensate for consuming excessive quantities of food. At the age of 22, Claireabelle was diagnosed with bulimia nervosa by her psychiatrist. Her illness gave her constant anxiety, as her whole life revolved around food and her need to purge it after eating.

"I could think of nothing but the food I was about to eat, how I would hide it, and where the nearest toilet was, so I could immediately get rid of it," Claireabelle said.

Physically, Claireabelle's body was seriously impacted by her bulimia, suffering from severe acid reflux. Some of her teeth began to rot as a result of the stomach acid from her persistent purging. Mentally, Claireabelle could somewhat see that her actions were self-destructive, however the "voice" of the eating disorder always possessed more power.

"I felt like I was in a zombie-like state. I believed everything negative my brain told me and I just followed along with it," said Claireabelle.

Claireabelle began regular treatment with a psychologist, in an effort to curb her bulimia nervosa. Another event involving her abusive ex-partner triggered Claireabelle to relapse again, however, this time she no longer purged her food, instead she succumbed to regular binge-eating episodes.

Claireabelle began isolating herself from her family and friends. She spent her days binge-eating and her weight surged to 160 kilograms at its peak. Claireabelle felt constantly drained, both physically and mentally, as her eating disorder controlled her every action. Her weight gain began having a negative affect on her ability to walk and breathe, and even impacted on everyday activities such as showering and going to the toilet.

"I felt like a monster, I didn't want anyone to see me," Claireabelle said.

At the age of 25, Claireabelle was diagnosed with binge-eating disorder by her psychologist, the third manifestation of her disordered eating.

Claireabelle spent many hours in therapy with her psychologist, practicing mindfulness and learning to overpower the voice of her illness in her head. She learned to identify her eating disorder triggers and how best to manage them, practicing healthier eating habits.

"I had to avoid eating in front of the TV or in the car, instead sitting at a table with my food, taking in all the flavours and smells," said Claireabelle.

Today, Claireabelle has been treatment-free since the end of 2018. She is passionate about music and singing, having come runner-up in the solo section of the World Championships of Performing Arts in Hollywood two years ago. Claireabelle works as a nanny to three young children and has over 23,000 followers on her Instagram account, [Life of a Binge Eater](#), sharing her experiences of her eating disorder with the world.

That's why Claireabelle is a passionate advocate of the Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative (EDGI) New Zealand, a study dedicated to identifying the genes that predispose people to developing an eating disorder. She strongly believes this research is urgently needed, to raise awareness of the causes of eating disorders and improve treatment options, in order to save the lives of many New Zealanders.

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