

body+soul DAILY

What's trending on bodyandsoul.com.au



- 1: The 7 day detox plan
- 2: Men know if you're fertile by your wiggle
- 3: "My husband said he didn't love me"
- 4: 9 foods that help you lose weight
- 5: Prostate cancer warning signs

Can stories of survival help others?

Daniela Ongaro

Author June Alexander first showed signs of an eating disorder as an 11-year-old, growing up on the family farm. Diagnosed in her mid-20s with anorexia nervosa and bulimia, she waged an almost lifelong battle against the illness until finally reclaiming her "freedom" eight years ago.

"It robbed me of so much of my life and I'm still catching up," says the 63-year old who says the illness led to her failed marriages and estrangement from her parents and sister.

"Once it grabs hold of you it's like having this bully in your brain 24/7. The good thing about finally getting through an eating disorder is that you just love life. All those years I looked for peace in my mind, my heart and my soul and I have that now."

Since her recovery, Alexander, a journalist and newspaper columnist, has turned to researching and writing books about eating disorders and mental health issues.

Her memoir of her journey to recovery, *A Girl Called Tim*, is among five personal accounts from survivors of anorexia selected for a world-first study to assess how such accounts can be used in the recovery process, with the aim of finding a definitive treatment for the disorder.

Psychologist and PhD candidate at The University of Sydney, Lisa Dawson, is leading research into how the personal accounts of those who survive anorexia can help others.

Her previous research focused on people who had fully recovered from anorexia to assess and examine their crucial stages of recovery.

"They told their stories (of

recovery) and now we're taking those stories and asking is it helpful for others to read them," she says.

Anorexia overwhelmingly affects young girls and women, mostly at ages 14 and 18, and has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness — around 15 to 20 per cent over 20 years.

"We are getting closer to understanding more about anorexia but it is still an illness we know little about," Dawson says.

"There are some treatments for adolescents using family based therapy but for adults there is still no definitively, effective treatment."

Researchers are still seeking people with anorexia or an eating disorder for this unique study which is conducted online and remains confidential.

To inquire about taking part contact
 lisa.dawson@sydney.edu.au
 daniela.ongaro@news.com.au



June Alexander has battled anorexia since she was 11. Picture: Mitch Bear

AN EXCERPT FROM "A GIRL CALLED TIM"

Six weeks (after my daughter's wedding) I was back at home sitting on my veranda, looking up at the Milky Way with my cat and dog at my feet. I knew I was there. I was myself again. I still had a lot of work to do but I knew now that I was more in control than the eating disorder. I was on my way to recovery. That moment was a turning point for me. It was like winning a marathon. It was my Everest. I've come this far, I thought to myself, I'm not going back. And I haven't. This time was different because everything was starting to come together. I'd made it through some really awful times. So many different, hurtful things had happened, but I had survived.

Having lived with an eating disorder for so long meant that I felt like I had this big, black hole within me. It was really scary because it had such a hold on me. To let that go, and start working towards recovery, felt like I was jumping off a cliff. I had to find a whole new way of living, of coping with life. I had all these people around me who supported me. I had the support of my children as well as close friends, my psychiatrists, my therapists, and my GP. I felt accepted by these people and that helped me to accept myself. I had to learn that I was an OK person. They helped me to repeat over and over again that I deserved to

be treated with respect. Working towards recovery was a long process. I learnt that most people live automatically, but people recovering from an eating disorder need to live manually. Everything needed to be done consciously. I had to learn that starving myself did not mean I was in control. I had to learn that starving and bingeing was not the way to cope with my feelings. I had to let the control over the food go, which I always knew at some level was always doomed to fail. Learning to let these behaviours go was very, very scary. Even though I knew they were wrong I did not know any other way. I was becoming self-aware and would ask myself, what's bothering me right now? I'm going to deal with this right now. I learnt to listen to music, or walk my dog, or talk to God, call a friend.

It was very difficult. I used to despair that I would never be able to look forward to a meal or eat three meals a day. At first I would worry that I wouldn't know when I was full or when to stop eating. I had to let everything go. It was like having a valuable smashed plate and putting all the pieces back together to rebuild your identity and reclaim it. It was as if I'd lost an arm or leg as I had to relearn to do things that other people do automatically. I had a hole in my mind where my eating disorder had been. So healing and adapting took time.

GOOD HEALTH
 Chloe Boreham

STARRING IN CHANNEL SEVEN'S TELEMOVIE, THE KILLING FIELD

What is your health mantra?

Nothing beats being honest with yourself about your health. A daily dose of meditation and a morning jog keep me in shape and focused. Centennial Park is my favourite spot in Sydney for a quick run.

What fitness move or routine has made a difference to your body?

Nothing beats dancing. No matter what country I'm in, the first thing I do is to scout a five rhythms dance class. There's so much freedom in just being able to let loose on the dance floor. Music and dance: perfect combination.

What is your go-to health snack?

I always have a collection of nuts in my bag. They are like my little saviours in times of need. When I'm on set for long periods, I can just grab a handful to keep me going.

What is your favourite body part and why?

My tattoo (a circle) on my wrist. It took me five years to come up with it, five minutes to actually get it done, and if I could have it my way, I'd have five more.

If you could exercise with anyone in the world, who would it be and why?

I'd love to exercise with my LA friends, Beejan and Tim — any excuse to see them, really (I miss them terribly). There is nothing better than exercising with friends, it's great for motivating each other and catching up.

If you could only eat one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Without question, it would have to be cheese. My mum's French so I've been brought up loving cheese. I am obsessed!

Gemma's tips

Editor, body+soul

SAY HELLO TO CINNAMON

Pop some ground cinnamon on your cereal, or add it to your smoothies. Cinnamon stimulates digestion, relieves indigestion, excess wind and nausea, improves circulation and has been found to help keep blood sugar levels balanced, which makes it an ideal spice for diabetics. Cinnamon is also very high in antioxidants.



Program your lifestyle

Research on weight loss can be depressing: 40 per cent of Australian women and 30 per cent of men are on a diet; and 50 per cent of people quit their exercise program just six months after starting it. In 2012 it was predicted we would fork out more than \$800 million on quick-fix, weight-loss solutions, yet 83 per cent will have gained back everything they lost — and often more — within two years. So what's the key to weight loss? The

answer also lies in research. Studies show that changing just two behaviours — spending less time in front of computer and TV screens and eating more fruit and vegetables — lead to a healthier lifestyle. Working out with a partner will mean you spend more than twice as long on an exercise bike (21.9 minutes) than those who ride alone (10.6 minutes). And joining an online weight-loss program and being active on the website will lead you to lose

more weight than less active members. That's where body+soul revolution comes in; it's a 10-week, online, scientifically proven program that can help you change your life, and it kicks off on May 11. Meal plans, exercise programs, support and endless motivation are all provided and it's just \$99, or \$149 if you sign up with a partner. You can change your life. Join now at bodyandsoul.com.au/revolution and beat the statistics.

body+soul revolution