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ED RECOVERY

WITH

MEG MCCABE

CERTIFIED EATING DISORDER RECOVERY COACH

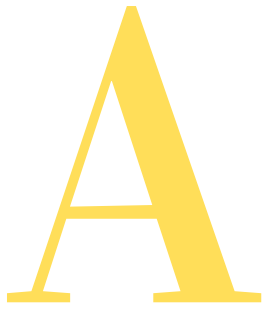


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ABOUT MEG

In a nutshell, I'm a vivacious and compassionate person. I consider myself an outgoing introvert with an artistic, free spirit who is moved to help people.

I grew up in a small, suburban town in Connecticut. Since graduating from college I've lived in New York City, Boston, and Denver. I am a certified Eating Disorder Recovery Coach, Life Coach and Mental Health First Aid instructor. I consider myself an enthusiast to my core, and I generally dive into new opportunities with full force. For fun, I love blogging, the beach, hiking the mountains, swimming, listening to podcasts, dancing and going to concerts.

MY ED STORY & ED COACH JOURNEY

When I was in high school I was a perfectionist and became obsessed with becoming thin enough to be a runway model in New York City. This obsession started with an "innocent" diet that soon turned into extreme restriction. From there, I developed bulimia. My ambition to live a unique, glamorous life of a model drove my eating disorder. By the time I graduated high school, I had signed a modeling contract with an international agency. I knew deep down, my size wasn't sustainable long term. I only lasted as a full time model for a few months. My eating disorder became such a problem that I decided to quit to focus on healing my relationship with food and my mental health.

When I quit modeling, my recovery journey began at home with my family. I saw a therapist and nutritionist and after a few months returned to college and reached full recovery by my early 20's. The first several years after my recovery I let my eating disorder story slip into the background. I knew the entire experience helped shape my life and learn valuable lessons, but I didn't see it fitting into my career at first.

When I graduated from college I moved to New York City (again) and became a certified Life Coach.



I had a challenging time as a young life coach trying to help people through all sorts of problems. I knew I needed a niche, however I was not sure which direction to go. Every time I hosted a coaching workshop, I'd share my eating disorder recovery story and that part of the event always seemed to resonate the most with the audience.

During that time, I had a moment in which I was tempted to relapse after almost 5 years of full recovery. My healthy inner voice fought back, and I resisted the urge to follow through with the eating disorder behavior I wanted to engage in. It was in that moment I realized my niche should be coaching people through eating disorder recovery (as stigmatized and vulnerable as that niche might be!)

Now, I work with individuals who have lost their intuition with food and are looking to restore a peaceful, uncomplicated relationship with food and their bodies. You do not need to have a full-blown eating disorder to work with me, you just need to have the determination to heal. As a coach, I am determined to help my clients break free from food obsession and live a life that's present, light-hearted and meaningful.

HOW WOULD ONE KNOW THAT THEY HAVE AN EATING DISORDER?

If you think you may have an eating disorder, there are some obvious red flags to first come to terms with. If you're skipping meals to the point of starvation, bingeing, purging, experiencing dramatic changes in weight in short periods of time, exercising excessively or have lost your periods, I recommend you go to a doctor immediately to discuss behaviors and potentially get a diagnosis.

As far as other behaviors go, constantly counting calories, cutting out entire food groups, tracking your food, weighing yourself, measuring yourself, scrutinizing your body, eating in secret, extreme mood swings and chronic dieting are also signs. If you have any questions about whether or not you have an eating disorder, I recommend going to the National Eating Disorders website, (NEDA.org) and taking the eating disorder screening tool to get a better idea of where you are.



And finally, if after reckoning with your behaviors still leaves you uncertain, I think a good measure of whether you need help is **how much your emotions are tied to food and eating**. If you're beating yourself up after eating something you "shouldn't", this could be a symptom. If the number you see on the scale directly impacts your mood/happiness, this is also a symptom that something is wrong. The bottom line is, if your emotions around food and eating are volatile and upsetting, this is really what crushes one's mental health. Again, going to a doctor and discussing what you're experiencing is the best way to get your questions answered.

ADVICE ON FEELING SHAMEFUL TOWARDS EATING

I think the best advice I could give is to let go of secrecy. Find someone you can talk to about this in a neutral, non-judgemental way. Evidence shows that those who have a strong recovery support team are more successful with recovery than those who do not have one. When I first opened up about my eating disorder, it drove a wedge between myself and my eating disorder. It showed me I could distance myself from it and that recovery was possible.

Another piece of advice I have is to practice self-compassion and flexible thinking. Nothing is truly black and white, it's all a shade of gray. Learning to be kind to yourself and your body, and to learn to forgive yourself throughout the recovery process is crucial. Self forgiveness is a skill you can develop and keep with you for the rest of your life. This is something I learned during my recovery that has made my recovered life a lot easier.

HARDEST PART OF MY ED JOURNEY

I think the hardest part of the journey was truly giving up the dreams I had attached to the eating disorder. My eating disorder gave me hope for a glamorous, special life. Giving up that dream was the hardest part. Once I was able to put the dreams/illusions that were attached to my eating disorder behind me, I could move forward.

HOPE

It is absolutely possible to have a healthy relationship with food. No matter how dark and hopeless you feel right now, these feelings are temporary. In fact, the only thing

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Y YOU ARE NOT ALONE

No matter which eating disorder a person is diagnosed with, I can relate to survivors and my clients when it comes to experiencing a preoccupation and obsession with food. I remember how much thinking about food dominated my brain space. I also remember how scary it was to feel out of control with food and my body. I think this is something that I share with my clients that they can deeply relate to. With my clients, I utilize this common denominator in helping them let go of control and challenge their food rules and beliefs in emotionally safe ways.

WHAT DOES "FULLY RECOVERED" EVEN MEAN?

I maintain Carolyn Costin's definition of recovery:

The person can accept his or her natural body size and shape and no longer has a self-destructive or unnatural relationship with food or exercise. When you are recovered, you do not use eating disorder behaviors to deal with, distract from, or cope with other problems. When recovered, you will not compromise your health or betray your soul to look a certain way, wear a certain size or reach a certain number on the scale."

– Carolyn Costin

As someone who has fully recovered, I do not have negative, unhealthy thoughts often. When I do, those thoughts act as an alarm system to let me know that something else may be stressing me out in that moment. As a recovered person, I am aware of these thoughts and do not act on them. When I have a negative thought, I generally shrug it off and move on. I have developed a protective awareness that prevents me from holding on to those thoughts because I know they can lead to a really dark place. It's like I've developed a suit of armour to protect myself from negative thoughts about my food and eating over the years.

SUPPORTING YOUR LOVED ONE WHO HAS AN ED

As a Mental Health First Aid trainer, I help community members learn how to have difficult conversations about mental health with their loved ones. First, it is important to educate yourself on the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and be on the lookout for those with the friend you are concerned with.

When you start the conversation with your friend, choose a safe, private place to do so. Start by mentioning the behaviors you've observed in a non-judgemental way. For instance, you could say *"I've noticed you've been skipping meals and talking negatively about your body lately, and it concerns me. Do you think you might be struggling with an eating disorder?"* Being neutral, yet direct during the conversation goes a long way because you can't avoid the issue or dance around it. Using language softeners like "might" or "perhaps" will help a person feel less defensive as well.

I also believe connecting your friend with resources is helpful. Make starting recovery easy for them. For instance, offer to call the doctor and make an appointment or to research therapists in the area. You could also drive them to their first appointment or attend a support group with them. Sometimes, showing up and communicating that you are truly there for them will empower them to choose recovery.

FURTHER HELP FROM MEG

In private practice I offer recovery packages as well as individualized sessions. The packages are a 3-6 month commitment in which we meet weekly via video chat. I have clients from all of the world!

During the sessions we work through the 8 Keys to Recovery Workbook and dive deep into behavior and mindset change. Between sessions I provide individualized homework assignments to challenge their food rules and beliefs. If they're in the Denver area, I can meet with them in person for meal sessions, grocery shopping, cooking sessions or shopping for clothes to fit their changing body.

One of the most valuable components to my services is that I'm available through texting, email and phone calls throughout the week to support my clients during difficult moments in which they might be experiencing an urge to engage in a negative behavior, or having an emotional crisis. This communication also helps my clients remain accountable throughout the process.

Finally, if the client agrees, I have the ability to connect with other members of their recovery team such as their therapist, primary care doctor, nutritionist, family members or significant other. This communication keeps everyone on the same page and strengthens the recovery team as a whole.

If someone doesn't want to commit to an entire package, I also offer small coaching programs, such as the "Open Up about your ED" program, in which I coach people on how to open up about their eating disorder to their loved ones to get the support they need. I also offer 90 minute "Food Guit Freedom Sessions" in which I analyze food rules and beliefs, and help the client challenge their behaviors in small, achievable ways. By request, I can also provide food freedom and body image workshops to small and large groups.

Please go to my website, babygotbackblog.com/coaching-services to get a full list of what I offer!

DIET CULTURE & ED

In general, eating disorders are not talked about openly enough. The prevalence of diet culture provides people with mixed messages about food and eating which normalizes disordered eating, making eating disorders really difficult to identify and fully understand.

There is a narrative out there that eating disorder recovery is really hard to accomplish. I hear that, but I'd like people to start believing that recovery doesn't have to be hard. With the right mindset, support, resources and education, it can be very manageable. My personal recovery process was a truly positive one. It opened my life up to spirituality, self-awareness and a food and body freedom that I regard to be my greatest super power.

CLOSING WORDS & GRATITUDE

I am so thankful to my clients and for everyone who supports my coaching practice. You are the beautiful, brave people who help me connect to my life's purpose.

I am super thankful to Toi Magazine for publishing this feature!

Additionally, I am thankful to my family for supporting me throughout the recovery process and connecting me with the resources I needed at the time. I love you guys!

Finally, I am thankful to the Carolyn Costin Institute for their amazing coach training program which has launched me into this career. Their support has given me the tools and confidence I need to do what I'm meant to be doing on this earth.

