

# Teen Bares Her Battle With Anorexia, How She Won

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It started off with calorie counting: Examining labels on food, making sure everything she ate was cooked exactly the way she liked it.

But when Marisa Meiskin started throwing her meals into the garbage can and her parents had to sift through the trash to confirm whether she actually ate, they realized this was part of a much bigger problem. She was diagnosed with anorexia. She was 13-years-old at the time.

Marisa, now 16, says it was about control.

If she could control what she ate and subsequently her weight, then everything would be OK.

In her mind everything was great, even though she had lost so much weight, she "looked like a boy" and her friends had stopped talking to her, and she often felt faint and even passed out.

Marisa is sharing her story because she wants people to understand anorexia -- that it is a debilitating disorder rooted in control and not vanity.

Her parents saw that she needed help fast. They first brought her to a hospital in Somerville, New Jersey.

After a few visits, they discovered that while she would gain weight at the hospital, when she returned home, she would starve herself again to lose that weight.

She became even more faint, her skin became jaundiced, and the doctor suggested immediate hospitalization when her heart rate had become dangerously low.

This she said was not for vanity. It was all for control, even at a time when her parents could see her life slipping away.

They sent her to Utah for specialized treatment. Even though her insurance carrier, Aetna would not cover it and it would cost tens of thousands of dollars a month, they sent her.

They took a second mortgage out on their home to pay the hospital and travel bills. Marisa would spend six months there -- six months that would change her life and her family's forever.

Marisa and her parents, Cindy and Jeff, are plaintiffs in a landmark court case in New Jersey.

When Aetna, like other insurance carriers, told them eating disorders are considered non-biological based mental illnesses and have coverage limitations, they sued.

What makes this a landmark case is that Aetna settled with them. They agreed to pay for coverage that had been denied because it exceeded maximum limits within the past seven years and the company agreed to cover all full insured Aetna members.

While the Meiskins are clearly happy they will have tens of thousands of dollars restored to them, they are also glad to know that because of their case, future victims of this debilitating disease won't have to go through the same red tape.

Battling eating disorders can be difficult alone, here are several places people can find support and information:

National Eating Disorders Association

Gail R. Schoenbach Foundation