

Mackenzie's Hope

A Girl's Tale of Anorexia
by Lorrie Crow & Photos by Deb Colson

When she was a freshman Mackenzie Brooks weighed 118 lbs. at 5'4".

By her junior year, she was down to an emaciated 88 lbs., but still losing weight because she believed she was too "fat". Mackenzie was the victim of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, eating disorders that largely affect young adolescent females, with females between 15 and 19 years old making up 40% of all cases.

Bulimia nervosa involves binge eating large amounts of food and then purging them. Anorexia nervosa, the extreme fear of gaining weight, engages in limiting food intake and excessively exercising to lose weight. The trigger for Mackenzie was a comment from her then-boyfriend who told her how ugly she was. Mackenzie remembers, "I just thought – maybe if I was skinner..."

Losing Sight of Reality

But when Mackenzie began purging her meals to lose weight, her new boyfriend discovered her secret and told her parents. "My mom wouldn't let me into the bathroom for at least an hour after meals, so my meals would digest," Mackenzie says. "Once I realized that my food couldn't come out is when I decided food would not go in. So, during my sophomore year, I stopped eating." She would also exercise constantly, wearing sweats at the gym so no one would notice how thin she was and admitted to taking laxatives, losing 10 lbs. within a month.

Allison Brooks, Mackenzie's mother, says at first she never suspected Mackenzie had a problem. "We were a little concerned about the weight loss but she had never really given us any reason to believe she was having any issues, and she said she was getting in shape for the school drill team," Allison says.

Physical Repercussions

But, eventually, anorexia puts a serious strain on the body, and Mackenzie was no exception to the disorder's major downsides. She was always tired, was anemic, her hair was falling out, and she suffered from amenorrhea. Although hungry, the teen said she just ignored the hunger pangs and was in denial. Later, Allison recalls, "Mackenzie's doctor told us that her heart was so bad

that if she climbed the stairs in a two-story house, she could have a heart attack." Her parents also noticed some atypical behavior with Mackenzie's personality. "She started to be angry, mean to her brother, and short with us," Allison says. While Allison says she understands those signs can be typical teenage behavior, she warns parents to pay close attention to it.

A hospital visit and evaluation – explained to friends and others as a viral infection – officially diagnosed Mackenzie as anorexic and she saw a therapist during her stay. "I was still in denial," Mackenzie sighs, "I thought that I could stop at any time." But the day she broke down at school and called her mom, and her parents came and withdrew her, is when Allison said she felt a huge release from all the worrying. "I confided with a co-worker then," Allison says. "There were several people who were extremely caring and understanding, and our pediatrician agreed something had to be done."



Females ages 15 -19 make up 40% of all bulimia and anorexia cases

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- Dr. Cadwalder**



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A Special Kind of Therapy

That something turned out to be the Cadwalder Behavioral Clinic in Tomball, an eating disorder clinic that specializes in equine therapy. In April 2007, Mackenzie told her mother she was ready to go and had accepted that a problem existed. “We felt helpless until she said she needed help,” Allison remembers. “I believe this is the reason none of the other therapies worked - she didn’t want help then.”

The clinic serves a majority of female adolescents with anorexia, but also aids patients of any age with disorders such as bulimia and binge eating. “Anorexia also takes a toll on ‘empty nest syndrome’ women,” warns Dr. Kathy Cadwalder, director and co-founder of the clinic, also noting the disorder affects young children, citing a case with 10-year-old twins. The clinic’s typical program for anorexics is to get them up fairly early to feed the horses. “The patients are actually ‘feeding’ something – they have to calculate the amount of protein the horses take in, calculating their feed rations to ensure the horses get proper nutrition,” Dr. Cadwalder explains. The clinic teaches patients to calculate their own metabolism. “The girls have to learn to eat in a healthy manner and take in a certain amount of food in a day, and, in turn, burn a certain amount of calories to maintain their weight.”

Gaining Weight, Gaining Insight

After about a month, Mackenzie began gaining weight. She partici-

pated in the clinic’s programs that included a one hour devotion, interactive 12-step meetings, and discussion groups with topics such as body image and anger management. She left the clinic in June, but continued with the program, completely weaning from it in January 2008.

Today, as a recent high school graduate, 18 year-old Mackenzie feels, “for the most part, recovered.” She admits to having some bad days and says she goes to the gym to work out, but only for an hour maximum, or she colors in coloring books to counteract those feelings. “If I think she is having a bad day, I give her a hug, and ask her,” Allison smiles. “If she says, “No”, I drop it. I won’t freak out if she has one bad day, and so far, by the next day, she is out of her funk.”

Mackenzie no longer weighs herself and believes her health is good. She sometimes still feels fat, restricts some food – like pizza, but will easily take bites from an ice cream sundae. She says she knows she is lucky to have such supportive family and friends. Her mother feels proud of Mackenzie for finally realizing she needed help. “She knows if it wasn’t for that facility, she might not be here now,” Allison says.

In the meantime, Dr. Cadwalder laments how sad it is that we grow up in a world where we are judged entirely by how we look. “Our character should be the primary thing that is judged, not our physical looks,” she encourages. Mackenzie seems to agree. “I have a quote written on my bathroom mirror,” she smiles. “If you can’t handle me at my worst – you don’t deserve me at my best.” **SLM**

LORRIE CROW is a writer who owns Write Designs, Inc. She has also been a mentor to teen girls.

Signs and Symptoms

Mackenzie exhibited the typical indications of anorexia. Some of the signs and symptoms are listed below:

- Dieting despite being thin
- Obsession with calories, fat grams, and nutrition
- Pretending to eat or lying about eating
- Preoccupation with food but eats very little herself
- Dramatic weight loss
- Feeling fat, despite being underweight
- Fixation on body image
- Harshly critical of appearance
- Denies being too thin

Where to Get Help?

There are many resources in and around the Sugar Land area. The best thing to do if you believe that you or someone in your family might be suffering from an eating disorder is to get help first and foremost, from your doctor.

Healthy Weigh

2801 Bammel Ln., Houston
713-622-6422
thehealthyweighonline.com

The Menninger Clinic

2801 Gessner, Houston
800-351-9058
menningerclinic.com

Cadwalder Behavioral Clinics

30903 Quinn Rd., Tomball
281-351-6644
cadwalderbehavioralclinics.com

Academy for Eating Disorders

aedweb.org

National Eating Disorders Association

nationaleatingdisorders.org

National Institute of Mental Health

nimh.nih.gov

Girl Power – a teen site

Girlpower.gov/girlarea/bodywise

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GET READY FOR

FLU SEASON

Tips from Sugar Land
Medical Experts

Written By Tonya Ellis

Aaaachooo! Cold and flu season is upon us and it's the season to be sneezing in Sugar Land! But have no fear because area medical experts are here to share the ways to avoid the sniffles, sore throats, and fevers this fall.

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What Causes Flu and Colds?

Both the flu and colds are caused by viruses. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the droplets become air borne. Touch your mouth, nose, or eyes after coming in contact with these droplets, and you're a candidate for a sick bed and mama's chicken soup.

"From a clinical standpoint it's difficult to tell the difference between a cold and the flu," says Jeffery Alford, a family practice physician at Sweetwater Medical Associates. They have similar symptoms; fever, runny nose, sore throat, cough, sneezing, headache, muscle aches, and can last from five to seven days. But the flu starts more suddenly with more severe symptoms, and may include vomiting and diarrhea.

Normal, healthy people who develop the flu generally are back on their feet after about a week. For the very young, old, or sickly, the virus can be deadly. About 36,000 people a year die from the flu in the United States. Those at increased risk of death from the flu include babies younger than six months, adults older than 50, and people with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.

Fighting the Flu

Experts suggest the best way to avoid the flu is to get vaccinated. The flu vaccine is recommended for those six months or older. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine for colds. "Vaccines prepare your body to fight off the flu and lessen your symptoms if you do get it," says Dr. Alford. "If you're exposed to a virus you have memory cells in your body, and you will develop antibodies to that virus; whereas, someone who has not been exposed will not," he adds. Getting the flu vaccine also protects loved ones who can't be vaccinated. If you have a baby less than six months old, they are at high risk. For their protection, Dr. Alford highly recommends moms and dads, as well as all siblings, get the vaccine.

"Some people think a flu shot will make them sick, but that's not the case," says Charise Miltenberger, a registered nurse and infection control practitioner at Methodist Sugar Land Hospital. "It's an inactivated virus. If you got sick afterwards, it's a coincidence," she adds.

Flu vaccines can also be given through a nasal spray, which can cause weak flu symptoms because it is made from a weakened flu virus. The nasal spray can only be taken by people ages two to 49.

Last flu season, two out of the three flu vaccines selected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention didn't match the flu viruses that were out in the population. However, the CDC predictions have been right in 16 out of the last 20 flu seasons. Even though the 2007 and 2008 seasons may have not been such great years, the vaccine gave a 44 percent protection against the flu.

Rx

When to Call the Doctor

What looks like the common cold or flu could be pneumonia, which can develop into another serious condition. Signs that a doctor should be called include shortness of breath or wheezing, fever above 102 degrees, an illness that lasts longer than five to seven days, complete loss of appetite, and dehydration.

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Getting Well

If you do fall sick with cold or flu, Dr. Alford has three words for you: fluids, fluids, fluids. Staying hydrated and getting plenty of rest helps your body as it fights off the flu. Tylenol and ibuprofen can also ease fever and headaches.

Alternative cures, such as herbal medicines, have not been scientifically proven to be effective against cold and flu, and may interact with other medications; therefore, it's best to check with your doctor before taking any. Home remedies such as tea with honey and lemon and chicken soup haven't been shown as cure-alls either, but may soothe symptoms.

In the end, taking simple measures should lead the average cold and flu sufferer back to health. "Stay at home, wash you hands, and cover your mouth. It's really not rocket science, but we fail to do the simple things," says Miltenberger. **SLM**

TONYA ELLIS enjoys writing and spending time with her husband and three children.

The Truth about The Cold & Flu

MYTH: *The flu shot makes you sick.*

FACT: The flu vaccine is made from an inactive flu virus, so it can not give you the flu. It takes the vaccine two weeks to work after your shot, so you are still susceptible to getting the flu in the meantime.

MYTH: *Once you get the flu, you must suffer until it is over.*

FACT: There are prescription antiviral medications on the market that can shorten the duration and severity of the flu. Over the counter medications can also lessen some flu symptoms.

MYTH: *Hot toddies help you recover from the cold or flu*

FACT: Hot toddies, which contain alcohol, can make you dehydrated and could actually make your cold or flu last longer.

MYTH: *You should feed a cold and starve a fever.*

FACT: The best thing you can do for your body during both colds and the flu is to keep it nourished and hydrated. So it's good to eat as much healthy food as possible and drink more fluids than usual when sick.



Tip! Carry Hand Sanitizing Wipes

"People go shopping from one store to another, and then go to the food court without washing their hands," says Miltenberger. After vaccination, use good hygiene practices such as keeping hand sanitizing wipes in your purse or pocket, cover your mouth completely when you cough or sneeze, and stay home from work or school when sick. "A lot of times people try to go to work, and what it does is spread it," she explains.

Health Bulletins

SUGAR LAND
MEDICAL NEWS



The Right Reverend Don A. Wimberly at the ribbon cutting ceremony for St. Luke's Hospital in Sugar Land

St. Luke's Sugar Land Hospital Grand Opening

St. Luke's Sugar Land Hospital, St. Luke's Episcopal Health System's newest facility, celebrated several grand opening events including a grand opening party, ribbon cutting ceremony, chapel dedication and employee appreciation luncheon. The Right Reverend Don A. Wimberly, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and chairman of the St. Luke's Episcopal Health System Board of Directors, presided over both the chapel dedication and ribbon cutting. Denton A. Cooley, MD, surgeon-in-chief, president emeritus and founder of Texas Heart Institute, and world renowned heart surgeon was also in attendance for the ribbon cutting. The 100-bed hospital will offer inpatient and outpatient services, including cardiovascular services and women's services, a "Sweet Beginnings" newborn nursery in addition to the level 2 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (Texas Children's Hospital®), and a 16-bed Intensive Care Unit.

Dr. Gadgil and Dr. Lance Join Memorial Hermann Medical

Dr. Gadgil and Dr. Lance Join Memorial Hermann Medical Family Medicine Specialist Neetee N. Gadgil, D.O., and Sleep Medicine Specialist Colleen G. Lance, M.D., have opened a Memorial Hermann Medical Group practice in Sugar Land. Memorial Hermann Medical Group is a physician-led subsidiary of Memorial Hermann Healthcare System. "Dr. Lance and I are very excited about the opportunity to provide care for families in the rapidly-growing Sugar Land area," says Dr. Gadgil, who is board-certified in family medicine.

Cancer Support Groups

Cancer Counseling holds a weekly support group at the Sugar Land Cancer Center located at 15500 Southwest Freeway. Registration is required. Please call 713-727-3561 for dates and times.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance sponsors free, volunteer-facilitated support groups for people with depression and bipolar disorder and for their families and friends. We also provide information to further education about and understanding of these treatable disorders. Our Adult Groups are for those 18 and older, while our adolescent groups are for those between the ages of 13 and 18. Visit dbsahouston.org or call 713- 600-1131.

ADULT SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Every Thursday, 7 p.m.
First United Methodist Church
3900 Lexington Blvd.
Chapel Parlor

ADOLESCENT SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

2nd and 4th Thursday, 7 p.m.

DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR SUPPORT ALLIANCE

St. Laurence Catholic Church
3100 Sweetwater Blvd.
Social Concerns Center, Meeting Rm. A