**AMNA GILLANI, AGE 20, ISLAMABAD**

During a party, some friends made fun of my protruding belly by poking it. It was a light-hearted moment, soon forgotten by them, but when I went home, I stared at the mirror for a long time with tears welling down my eyes. As someone who had a history of suffering from anxiety, this episode was very triggering and I wanted to find a way to control this situation.

Determined to not let this happen again, I pledged to start what I believed would be my "fitness journey".

"It's for my health," I would tell myself as I forced myself to starve every day, subsisting on a single meal a day. I gained encouragement as everyone from family members and coworkers to anonymous elderly ladies around the neighborhood started to compliment me on "looking smart". In Pakistan, as much of the world, the standard of beauty is a thin figure and health takes a back seat. "It's for my health," I would whisper as I cried while writing everything I ate in a journal. "It's for my health," as I gained solace in the figure shown on the weighing machine while my depression was spiralling out of control.

It was my father who noticed something wrong with me first. When he noticed me skipping meals, he urged me to eat more but soon realised that I could not be convinced. As time progressed, and he grew more worried by my thinning figure and irregular mood, he referred me to his nutritionist cousin.

It took a long time for me to be convinced that what I was doing was actually sabotaging my health regardless of how many people were complimenting my appearance. It took me even longer to stop weighing myself obsessively multiple times a day.

I am still in recovery. I still miss meals at times. But with the help of my nutritionist and therapist, I am on the path to a happier and truly healthier life in a journey of self acceptance.

**ANONYMOUS, AGE 19, MULTAN**

I was always mocked by everyone for being too skinny. My friends would tell me that my legs looked like hockey sticks and even expect me to laugh at it with them. These remarks did not bother me until I realised how short I was getting on stamina too. My irregular eating habits had started affecting my health. My studies were getting affected too because of lack of concentration.

All these factors had taken over me but one day, I finally decided to fix things for the sake of my own self. I started tracking my eating disorders, and slowly began working on them. I shifted from junk food to healthier meals and incorporated multivitamins in my diet. I also started exercising regularly and added fruits and vegetables to my everyday diet. I slowly started feeling energetic and active. I was able to give more time to my studies because of better focus too now. With all of these changes, I also noticed my body looking healthier. I gained weight and transformed from a frail looking girl into a healthy one.

Up till today, I have been following this routine, and it has made me feel so confident about myself.

**FATIMA ZAHEER, AGE 22, LAHORE**

Saturday nights, movies and my favorite McDonalds meal! It was my ideal weekend plan. I didn’t even realize when it became my daily habit. I gained pounds and inches all over my body. My friends and family started mentioning my increasing weight. I no longer wanted to attend parties and marriages. I no longer loved my body. I wasn’t even comfortable clicking my own photos. I tried hard to get back in shape through “instagram-hyped” diets and exercises. But it was nearly impossible for me, because I was addicted to fast food. I was binge eating daily. Tired of this endless self-hatred I found myself a shortcut.

Binge eating and purging. I was losing weight and fulfilling my cravings for a double cheeseburger. At the beginning it felt like the easiest way. Sooner I realized that instead of giving up binge eating I pushed myself to another eating disorder. Life was becoming miserable day by day. Finally I decided to pity myself. It was difficult to ask for help from my family because I was embarrassed and disappointed in myself. Then I found your support group.

Thanks to you guys for your motivation and support. You guys made me realize that my life is worth more than people’s comments. I realized that I cannot achieve my goal in a day or a week. I have to get better bite by bite. You made me realize that I have to love my body instead of the garbage I take in. And above of all you made me realize that my smile is worth more than molten lava!

Thank you!

**SA\*\*\*\* R\*\*\*\*, AGE 22, ISLAMABAD**

I couldn’t breathe. I had to get out, somehow to somewhere. All the noise and chatter couldn’t console me, or chain me to reality. The sights, the smells: all I knew in that moment was that I needed to go.

No occasion or event is often complete without food, it is what brings together people in most cultures and traditions, and events over food are the most common social interactions that bring people together. it is something to bond over, to talk about and engage in. I wish it had been the case for me. The mere thought, sight and smell of food sent me into a frenzy. The more pungent the smell the worse would be my reaction. The thought of gulping something down made me sick, and I remember being so overly conscious around people during events. Sometimes, I felt like the scale was my only true friend.

I could talk long and hard about what made me like this, all the societal and individual characters that drove my mentality towards freezing at the sight, smell of something that was intended to keep us alive. But we’re not here to talk about that. What I do wish to say is that, if this is you, you can take control. You can break away from your scale and realise it wasn’t your best friend, but your only enemy. No personality thought or mind can be measured, and definitely not by a measly scale. You can take charge; you can break the bounds of your mind and the measures of this scale that hold you back from your life: it does not define you. If it is difficult today, know that one day you will be able to function normally, you will be able to breathe and see and smell freely without fear of your own mind and body. It will be long and hard, but you will be able to do it. Getting a little help along the way wasn’t my plan either, but it is okay if you do.