

'MY ANOREXIA WAS SO DEEPLY EMBEDDED I COULDN'T TELL WHERE IT ENDED AND I BEGAN'

But a shocking health discovery set Emily Faber on a slow journey to recovery

When I was 31, after I'd been juggling an eating disorder for 13 years, my body gave up on me. Caragh Pittam, a gifted chiropractor, stepped in first. I'd had back pain for a while and cracked my ribs twice, so she packed me off for a DEXA (bone density) scan. The results came back quickly – I had severe osteoporosis of the lumbar spine and hip.

Caragh sent me to Professor John Axford, the best rheumatologist in his field, who told me in no uncertain terms that my bones were weak, brittle and could fracture at any point. But although the damage couldn't be reversed, there was an upside: the osteoporosis could be stopped if I put on weight. Unlike Professor Axford's elderly patients, I could make a recovery and have a chronic condition that would not restrict my life.

At five-foot-three, I weighed 95lb, clothes didn't fit me properly and I was constantly exhausted, anxious, angry or confused – and I hadn't had a sex life or a period for far too long. Although I'd been seeing psychotherapist Angela Brassett-Harknett for nine years in an attempt to manage my relationship with food, my weight was still too low. Yet I continued to tell myself I was in control. My anorexia was so deeply embedded I couldn't tell where it ended and I began.

But these were scientific facts that I couldn't ignore. Suddenly, I was petrified. Children, career, health – everything seemed compromised, but the perfectionist inside me raged on and the 112lb I was told I *had* to reach seemed unobtainable. Being small was my 'thing', my excuse; it made me different, it showed that I had restraint and discipline. I'd gone to a mixed boarding school and was the girl that all the boys wanted to be friends with but not date – so if I couldn't be pretty, I could be thin. It was my method of communication; it meant that I didn't have to grow up. It was the perfect buffer between me and real life.

Professor Axford put me on a strict regime – I had blood tests, swallowed huge amounts of calcium tablets, saw nutritionists and was encouraged to eat foods (pasta, cream, burgers) that scared the hell out of me. I panicked and I moaned, but gradually I came around. The weight crept on but it wasn't enough. A year after I was first diagnosed, further bone scans revealed that the osteoporosis had worsened.

At this point, something shifted. I wanted an end – I wanted to let life in again. I doubled my sessions with Angela from once a month to fortnightly, and I upped my food intake yet again. But the man who made an astronomical difference was Michael Garry (michaelgarry.london), a personal trainer who took on the task of piecing me back

together again. A father of three girls, Michael has a sensitivity and kindness rarely seen in a fitness expert, and to this day he turns up at my door: twice a week, at 7am – so there's no swerving sessions either.

Once a week, we're in the park, doing all sorts of clever things on tree stumps and benches; and once a week, we're at my house – we've turned a small corner of the sitting room into a makeshift gym with weights, a mat and a rubber pilates ball, all of which, when not in use, are stored away neatly with my ironing board. Michael's approach is simple and sensible: training is tailored to fit your life (more than twice a week is unrealistic for me and would get on my nerves) and sessions feel more like physio than an exhausting workout. Movements are put together to both shape and strengthen my body: in a similar way to pilates, Michael isolates specific muscle groups to help rebuild them, while including enough impact to reinforce my bones. He monitors the results when we meet, assessing my body to make sure everything is in proportion – not too big, not too small.

Most importantly, Michael isn't a dictator: I don't have to neck protein shakes at specific times of the day (crucial for my personality, which needs fewer rules, not more). Most of the time, in fact, I'm not even aware that I'm working out. (I'm regularly reduced to hysterics as I do squats against the wall while bemoaning my love life.) Still, the increase in my muscle mass is staggering. Now I'm able to lift suitcases on shoots at work, and the bicep curls that Michael had to help me with at the start of our training I can now do merrily on my own. It's terribly satisfying to feel your body come back to life.

Nearly 18 months after my first DEXA scan – the last six months of which have been managed by Michael (not discounting lots of psychological work on the side) – I'm proud of the physical turnaround. I've got an arse, tits, strong arms and defined legs, as well as a constant appetite, loads of energy and a sense of humour. I've got trendy dayglo Nikes and an outfit from Lululemon that makes me feel like hot stuff. Plus, all that weight training acts like a growth hormone – so I'm always trimming my nails and hair.

My next DEXA scan is in six months – and while the nature of osteoporosis means that my bone density will never fully recover, I'm hoping it will have stabilised. Yet despite such a U-turn, there are times when I want to give up. I weigh myself every day – and seeing numbers I don't recognise on the scales makes me want to scream and go back to bed. But Michael keeps me focused, repeating that any weight gain is good, not bad. I wrote a food diary, came to realise that almond croissants aren't the devil and threw out my tiny jeans and silly skirts. Now that I've reached my target weight, I'm working with my body, not against it. It doesn't hurt when I'm hugged. I'm strong, not fat. Oh, and best of all, I'm happy, not sad. □

