



Norbert von der Groeben

Left, Peach Friedman as she looks today. Bottom, Friedman as she looked while in the throes of an addiction to exercise.



# Knowing when to stop

Former exercise addict overcomes anorexia, fitness obsession

by Sue Dremann

**E**xercise nearly killed Peach Friedman. A victim of "exercise bulimia," she tracked every calorie she ate — and burned it off, plus more — through extreme exercise.

Her habit — while healthy in moderation — became a compulsion. Exercise drew her away from family and friends. She would not even take a vacation if it interfered with her regimen.

"I lost a dangerous amount of weight. My period ceased; I grew hair all over my body. I was skin and bones," Friedman recalled, sitting in her Palo Alto kitchen.

"Exercise bulimia" is a term coined by the media that refers to a coping behavior associated with anorexia, according to Yvonne Morris, a professor in Stanford's Department of Psychiatry and a specialist in eating disorders. Nearly 80 percent of Morris' patients who have the self-starvation disorder also engage in excessive exercise, she said.

Anorexia is actually a rare disorder, Morris said. Studies show it affects one-half to 1 percent of the population, with 90 percent being young women averaging 17 years of age.

"It's a disorder that goes back centuries," she said.

The term exercise bulimia is actually a misnomer, she added. Bulimics binge on food, then purge by vomiting; but anorexics don't binge or purge. They use exercise inappropriately to cope with anxiety and to gain a sense of control when facing life events over which they have no control, she said.

Friedman's descent was precipitated by a

series of stressful events.

Between her sophomore and senior years of college, she lost her boyfriend of four years, struggled through doubt about the economic viability of her career as a poet, and faced the potential break-up of her parents' marriage. (They are together again, she said.)

Before she became ill, Friedman had happy and of normal weight, and she was neutral if not happy with her body, she said. But looking back, at around age 20, she developed a consciousness toward healthy eating and exercise.

"Then, it may sound strange, but I saw the movie 'There's Something about Mary,' with Cameron Diaz," she said. That image of a tall, blond, thin woman who was irresistible to men, became the image Friedman, who is 5-foot 9-inches tall, felt compelled to emulate, she said.

Tall, attractive and blond herself, Friedman is outgoing, friendly and direct, much as she described herself as a child: a happy kid who loved food.

Outwardly, she didn't exhibit the perfectionism often associated with sufferers of the disease. Friedman's mother, a meticulous woman who carefully arranged food decoratively and cut the cookie on her plate in half, had been anorexic. But Peach and her sister were the opposite types. They sat on the kitchen floor, scooping ice cream out of the container, she said. Friedman wonders about heredity as a factor in her eating disorder.

A body of evidence does point to a genetic

predisposition to develop anorexia, Morris said.

Friedman, now 27, reflected on her evolution from happy-go-luck kid to self-obsessed exercise addict.

"It was progressive. I was never overweight. ... I became obsessed with J Crew models. I questioned my boyfriend all the time. I asked him if he'd be happier if I looked like them. I needed something to hold on to," she said.

"I developed a relationship with the eating disorder. I thought, 'If I let go of that, I'll just freefall.' ... I exercised addictively. I couldn't take a day off."

Friedman's world of counting calories and exercise became an obsession of numbers that seeped into her writing. Numbered poems became more like lists, and her violent, moody imagery became even darker, she added.

At her parents' Charlottesville, Va. home for Christmas break, the "lusty kid" who was full of life turned deathly thin, she said. Photographs of Friedman at that time portray a naked woman whose spine protrudes in ripples from beneath her skin. Her sunken eyes peer out of an emaciated face.

"I wanted real help and didn't know how to show it. I pushed it too far," she said.

With her parents' support, and accompanied by her mother, Friedman entered treatment. Her team consisted of a doctor, therapist and dietician. The words of her dietician were the most influential.

"She explained the science of it to me. She scared the s--- out of me," Friedman said.

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## Fitness obsession

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Friedman was at risk of a heart attack and metabolic problems, the dietician told her.

Anorexics have a 5 percent to 20 percent mortality rate, Morris said.

"Combined with excessive exercise, it's excessively dangerous. They are at risk for dehydration and electrolyte imbalances, and that can lead to cardiac abnormalities," she said.

Recovery was the hardest part of her illness, Friedman said, and she was "really ill for a year."

Eating again started Friedman on food binges, as her metabolism went into overdrive, she said. No longer able to mask her feelings with exercise, Friedman became depressed, but therapy helped her sort through her emotions.

"That's when the real work began," she said.

Anorexia and exercise bulimia are part of an anxiety disorder, Morris said.

"When things feel out of control, we look for ways to feel in control. We engage in behaviors in which we have an outcome, and it makes us feel in control," she said. Exercise is a way to see a tangible change and get feedback from others.

Friedman's recovery took three years, but now she has turned her experience into a vocation. She has become a personal trainer, helping individuals live a healthy lifestyle by exercising and eating in a balanced way, and focusing on what they enjoy.

She is starting a new job at Overtime Fitness in Mountain View, where she will work with teens to develop healthy body image and fitness programs. She is also writing a book about her disorder experi-

ence.

When clients bring her a photograph from a magazine and say they want to look like the model in the magazine, a red flag goes up, she said.

And when she works out at the local gym, she often sees really skinny women sweating away for hours at a time, a glimpse of her former self.

"Bulimic exercise is a severe attachment to a regimented way of exercise. If you feel so attached to exercise that the idea of missing a day makes you feel anxious, fearful or guilty, if you are equating intake with expenditure, there's a problem," she said.

She admitted she still tends to go on overdrive.

"My boyfriend tells me, 'You know, Peach, rest is a weapon.'"

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## When food makes you ill

Coping with allergies and intolerances

by The Health Library



Many Americans, young and old, suffer from some sort of food allergy or intolerance. For those coping with food allergy, research by the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology shows a significant impact on stress levels and daily activities—especially when it comes to meal preparation, social events and school attendance.

Perhaps no one worries more than parents as their kids go off to school, an environment over which the parents have little control.

There are resources available to help these families develop and maintain effective allergy-management strategies. All four of the books mentioned below are available at the Stanford Health Library.

Coping with Food Intolerances by Dick Thom, D.D.S., N.D. (Sterling Publishing Co, 2002) is a comprehensive guide, from diagnosis to management of all types of food intolerance. The top eight food allergens are milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, peanuts, tree nuts, wheat and soy. Thom discusses the differences between food allergy and sensitivity as well as the symptoms associated with both types of intolerance. The book provides readers with a system to evaluate food

sensitivity that includes a six-week substitution program.

He suggests healthy alternatives to common trouble-makers, including dairy, wheat, corn, and sugar, identifies hidden food sources and provides recipes, as well. Menu ideas, meal-planning suggestions and shopping lists are found in the appendix. Some of Thom's naturopathic viewpoint is controversial. Thankfully, he provides references from respected scientific journals to back up many of his assertions.

Many resources address individual food sensitivities and allergies. Of note is How to Live with a Nut Allergy by Chad K. Oh, M.D. (McGraw Hill, 2005). According to Dr. Oh, peanut and nut allergies are the No. 1 food-caused fatal and almost-fatal anaphylaxis in the United States. The book is subtitled, "Everything You Need to Know if You Are Allergic to Peanuts and Tree Nuts."

In 155 pages, this book does a notable job of living up to that claim. Nut and peanut allergies are explained clearly. Those at risk are identified and the process of diagnosis is described. The bulk of the book is dedicated to coping with these allergies. Avoiding exposure at home, at school and on the road is detailed. A chapter details the use of epinephrine or EpiPen to avoid anaphylaxis. A section of future developments, including hypoallergenic nuts and vaccinations, closes the book. How

author is the founder of nationwide support group R.O.C.K. (Raising Our Celiac Kids).

When Korn's son was diagnosed with celiac disease (gluten intolerance), she set out to learn all she could about living without gluten. The results of her research and experience can be found in this book. With all the user-friendly features of "Dummies" books, this book makes a gluten-free life seem easy to accomplish. Starting with the basics, the book explains just what gluten is, tells readers what celiac disease is and lists reasons to be gluten-free. The section called "Planning and preparing gluten-free foods" discusses creating a gluten-free kitchen and how to shop and cook. More than 65 recipes are included. All sound tasty and many are kid-friendly. Lifestyle issues surrounding gluten intolerance are also addressed, including eating away from home and overcoming emotional challenges.

Another valuable resource for families attempting to eliminate gluten is Incredible Edible Gluten-Free Foods for Kids by Sheri L. Sanderson (Woodbine House, 2002). This is primarily a cookbook, featuring 150 "family-tested" recipes. There are recipes and crafts ideally suited for young cooks. The book contains tips for starting a gluten-free life as well as a chapter explaining celiac disease. Cooking tips, such as baking substitutions and temperature-conversion rates, and a list of resources that includes gluten-free suppliers and support groups, are especially practical.

In addition to these books, many other books, videos and online resources are available, from the

### Mending Relationships



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