

Many reasons for eating disorders

Sarah Picton's psychiatrist is an expert in treating eating disorders. In the book *Finding Sarah* she explains:

FOR the most part, psychology understands the basis for eating disorders as derived from a combination of factors, rather than one single thing. So there might be a genetic component in terms of personality. There might be a learned component from learned behaviours in the home, learned behaviours around food, learned behaviours in the media, the things that have influenced someone their whole life. An eating disorder can also be part of another illness, usually what we call the "personality disorders".

There are multiple reasons why it's there. The addiction factor is a big one, and Picton has a propensity for addiction, which is often a familial thing.

Often, if somebody has an addiction, they tend to cross-addict. So they may have a food addiction, but if the food component of the illness isn't playing up, they

cross-addict and may start abusing substances for a while. Then, when they stop abusing substances they go back to the eating disorder, or gambling, or drugs, or alcohol, or one of the many possible addictions.

What differentiates one person from the other in terms of who might become addicted or who might not is the genetic aspect — their particular personality. Addicts tend to have a personality type that predisposes them to addiction, and their drug of choice might be narcotics or food. What differentiates one person's recovery from another's is a combination of their genetics and resources. Some might be able to recover on their own, and some might need more help.

Eating disorders are more prevalent in Western society. But in South Africa, they are becoming more common across the cultures. Usually, the biggest challenges are recognition and access to treatment.

● The doctor's identity has been protected

THE BOOK

These are edited extracts from *Finding Sarah: A True Story of Living with Bulimia* by Joanne Jowell, published by MacMillan, R205

NEED HELP?

In Cape Town phone Kenilworth Clinic on 021-763-4500. In Durban, call Riverview Manor on 033-701-1911. In Johannesburg, call Crescent Clinic on 011-792-9400

