

FIGHTING DEMONS

When Jemma Bellingham, 32, from Plymouth, underwent a Reiki session, she never knew the life-changing impact it would have on her...

Bringing my little boy home from the hospital, I expected to be enraptured in newborn bliss. Born on 9 August 2011 and weighing 7lb was our little Rio. 'Isn't he perfect?' I cooed, watching my husband Michael, 36, settle him into his new cot. Rio quickly became a family favourite, with my sister Carly, 42, popping round to see him. 'I've bought him something new!' she'd exclaim, bringing Rio a tiny new outfit or a teddy she'd bought especially for him. Rio completed our family.

My first baby... it should've been an exciting time for Michael and me. But instead, my mind spiralled out of control.

While my body hadn't drastically changed size throughout my pregnancy, the baby weight from my belly was unavoidable. Instead of feeling proud that my body had performed such a life-changing miracle, it became a bad hyperfixation. Fighting a battle with OCD all my life, I learned to live with my tendencies.

But as soon as I stepped out of the hospital with Rio, I felt the urge to seize control again. And my body was the first thing in the firing line. To me, it wasn't about losing weight or feeling insecure post-partum, my OCD just took over.

Quickly, I found myself counting my calories and restricting how much I ate. But Michael noticed my bad habits creeping back in. 'This needs to stop,' he said. 'We have to get you some help.' But I was in denial, wanting

to get back to normality. Throwing myself back into my work as a hairdresser, I worked 50 hours a week – Rio was just three months old. Luckily, my mum Shirley, 62, looked after him, thinking I just had a busy schedule. Catching glimpses of myself in the salon mirrors, I noticed that my face was slimmer. Even my size 12 clothes drooped off my shoulders. I was only grabbing small bites to eat, tallying up the calories in my head.

With Carly popping over to visit me and Rio, she soon caught on, too. 'Jemma, you look so tired,' she said. 'I'm just busy,' I insisted. 'What with the baby and work... I don't stop!' Within a few months, I dropped from a size 12 to 4.

But my façade wasn't enough to phase Michael. 'Why don't we go out for dinner tonight?' he suggested. 'I don't want to leave Rio behind,' I said. 'We're always at work as it is.'

It was true – I dedicated all my time to Rio outside of work. Bottle feeding him every three hours, I wanted him to be the healthiest and happiest little boy.

Despite knowing that deep down, I wasn't able to properly look after myself, I dedicated myself to being the best mum. But I just couldn't stop my disordered eating and relentless calorie counting, no matter what anyone said.

'Jemma, you need to start eating properly,' Mum warned. I knew it was wrong, but I felt like I was possessed – the disordered eating a demon I

couldn't banish. And matters only got worse as I started collapsing at random points throughout the day. Usually happening at home, Michael called for an ambulance in a panic. But soon, it became almost second nature. 'Jemma, this isn't normal,' Michael urged me. 'You need to go to the hospital and get checked.' *Am I really doing this to myself?* I thought, completely hopeless.

Seeing Michael look so defeated, I gave into his wishes, despite not wanting to admit that something was actually wrong. Going back and forth to Derriford Hospital four times in 2012, blood tests revealed that I had low blood pressure and a potassium deficiency. Instantly, I latched onto that – any concerns from the doctors about my eating habits or weight fell on deaf ears. I blocked it out, so much so that I don't remember being diagnosed with anorexia. 'You've just said I have a potassium deficiency,' I said. 'That's just how my body is.'

But my condition only worsened – due to my lack of eating, I was losing lots of blood through my faeces. I was even hospitalised for eight days, where I received five blood transfusions. With Michael staying home to look after Rio, I felt like I was letting my family down. Recovering in bed, I started hearing angelic voices. 'If you don't do something now, this could be the end,' they whispered. *Is this real?* I thought. But instantly, I took the



I dropped from a size 12 to size 4



Michael has been so supportive



MY SISTER SAVED ME



My body was the first thing in the firing line

I hadn't eaten a full meal in over five years

voices as a warning sign. Being prescribed oral tablets that encouraged weight gain and eating, I started putting on weight again. 'Wow, you're looking much better!' Carly exclaimed. My eating habits were far from healthy, though – instead of full meals, I'd reach for sugary biscuits. And the demon still had its



I was in denial about it all

grip on my mind. Soon, I stopped taking my tablets and counting calories became my norm again. Frustration churned inside of me, but I was locked inside my own body – there was nothing I could do to stop it. But Michael never gave up on me – he looked for private treatment, yet there was no way we could afford it. Only, there was someone closer to home who could help. 'You should try Reiki,' Carly advised. 'It will make you feel more like yourself again.' She'd recently discovered that she had spiritual healing gifts, offering Reiki sessions to private clients, too. *What do I have to lose?* I thought, warming up to it. And so I followed Carly to her Reiki room in town. Laying down on the bench, I breathed deeply as Carly held her hands above my body. *This is ridiculous,* I thought. *This is never going to work.* Only, I was entranced by an out-of-body experience. *You have to kill off the demon,* a voice echoed in my head... One I soon recognised was that of my Auntie Ann who passed away when I was 16. Trusting her words, my body broke free from the trance. Amazement swept over me as I blinked back into reality. 'How do you feel?' Carly asked, wide-eyed. 'I feel... amazing!' I gasped. It was like a mental weight had been lifted. To celebrate, Carly and I went for lunch at a local pub in town. Picking up the menu, I ordered a jacket potato and cheese without questioning it. It had been over five years since I'd eaten a full meal. 'How have you just done that?' Carly exclaimed in disbelief. But the demon had been banished – I ate without counting a single calorie. And every bite tasted better than the last. Perhaps there really was something healing about Reiki and spirituality... And in 2014, I realised that Carly wasn't the only one capable of it. Dreaming of my Auntie

Anne, she revealed a telling secret – that I had psychic gifts. My auntie had come to me before during my Reiki session with Carly – surely this now meant something, too? Being around close family members and friends, I started hearing the voices of what I now know are angels. Sensing the energy of those around me, their relatives came through with special messages for them. Explaining my gifts to Michael, he didn't believe it. But after doing a psychic reading on his best friend Adam, channeling a little old lady shaking and sitting in an armchair, he was taken aback. 'That's my nan,' Adam gasped. 'She had Parkinson's – that's why she's shaking.' 'Well, there's no other way to explain it!' Michael exclaimed. And since then, he has been nothing but supportive of my psychic abilities. Now, while I still work as a hairdresser, I've branched out to offer my services as a psychic medium to private clients in my free time. But better yet is that our life as a family is back on track. Cooking dinner with Michael and even heading out to restaurants again, recovery has never tasted so good. Due to the damage my eating disorder did to my body, I was told I'd never be able to have more children. But in 2019, I gave birth to our miracle baby Vienna, now four – something I predicted! Doing the school run with Rio and Vienna before work, I relish every day with them. Now I've banished the demon, I feel as though I've been set free. And I'm able to be the best mum I can be.

• For more, please follow @jembellingham22 on Instagram and Jemma Bellingham Worldwide Psychic Medium on Facebook.

If you've been affected by Jemma's story, please seek support on: beateatingdisorders.org.uk

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