

What's the Pro in Ana?

Fifteen year old Lucy gets up in the morning three hours before school and pounds the pavement for two hours and has one cup of black coffee when she gets back. This is her daily routine and has been for the last eighteen months. Lucy's mum is not aware as she is always working and Lucy's dad died six years ago in a plane crash. At school she struggles as she doesn't concentrate on her work and the teachers always find her doodling numbers and counting what she has ate every day. Her friends are very worried as she isn't interested in going out and doing normal teenage things. Anytime they ask her she says she's "going for a run" or "too busy" they are getting fed up and wonder if it's a waste of time trying to be her friend as she just doesn't care. Lucy gets frustrated because she wants to be a normal fifteen year old girl but feels like something is telling her not to and she should only focus on her diet and exercise. Another secret Lucy has is every night she logs on to her "Pro Ana" chat room and discusses her life with her cyber anorexic friends. Lucy's mum found the page open on her laptop but didn't say anything to her because she doesn't know what to say. She is scared for her daughter's life and has noticed the weight loss, thinking it was part of "growing up" or "becoming a woman". Her mum feels helpless as she has no one by her side. Six months later since finding out about her daughter's secret she gets a phone call from Lucy's school saying she has collapsed in a P.E class and can't find a pulse. She feels guilty and should've done something sooner. By the time Lucy gets to the hospital the doctors announce she is dead. Her mother feels it is all her fault and it's too late.

These controversial Pro-Ana websites seem to be growing with members week by week, at the same time anorexics are getting worse or even dying and these websites certainly aren't helping. So would the rest of us consider these sites as Pro-death?

Most of the members on Pro-Ana websites seem to be barely living or don't even want to be.

Anorexic boys and girls join this website to come together and give each other "tips" on how to lose weight or entice each other not to "give in" to food and to keep their willpower at a high. This is potentially dangerous for their lives and some Pro-Ana websites have been deleted due to members of their network dying or not hearing back from them.

On Pro-Ana websites you would frequently see girls list their "stats" which are height, weight, age and "goal weight." Sometimes there are even "second goal weights." The average goal weight is between 85 and 100lbs.

"Thinspiration" is often used on Pro-Ana websites. "Thinspiration" is usually pictures of painfully thin celebrities or models who these girls aspire to be like. They even post pictures of themselves at their lowest weight and let other girls comment on them.

On one particular website there are millions of members coming from all over the world writing to each other and the amount of drastic diet tips they give each other is phenomenal. One girl says, "Hey girls, do you know where I could get the best sort of

diet pills?” That girl got seven responses. Another girl comments before her saying, “I hate food! I hate it! I was supposed to be fasting today but I gave in. I’m such a fat failure and I want to die.” This girl only got two responses.

Another comment was being posted by a girl’s mum saying, “This is Amy’s* mum, I am signed on her account. She collapsed last night and is in intensive care now. I hope you girls are happy with yourselves for encouraging her to lose more weight.”

So if there is such bad feed back from these websites then why do they still exist? There must be something positive behind them. And usually to defend their “Pro” title, members say, it “is a social movement promoted by individuals who believe anorexia nervosa is a lifestyle choice and not a disorder.” These members choose not to be cured and want to stay ill for the sake of being in control. Some people want to join Pro Ana websites as they think it would be a good way of recovering from disease. Yet others will not accept any members who are in the recovery process or who wish to find treatment.

Between the years of 2001 and 2008 there has been more websites opened and the numbers of members are growing rapidly, does this mean the numbers of people suffering from anorexia is also growing rapidly?



By Rebecca & Aisling

