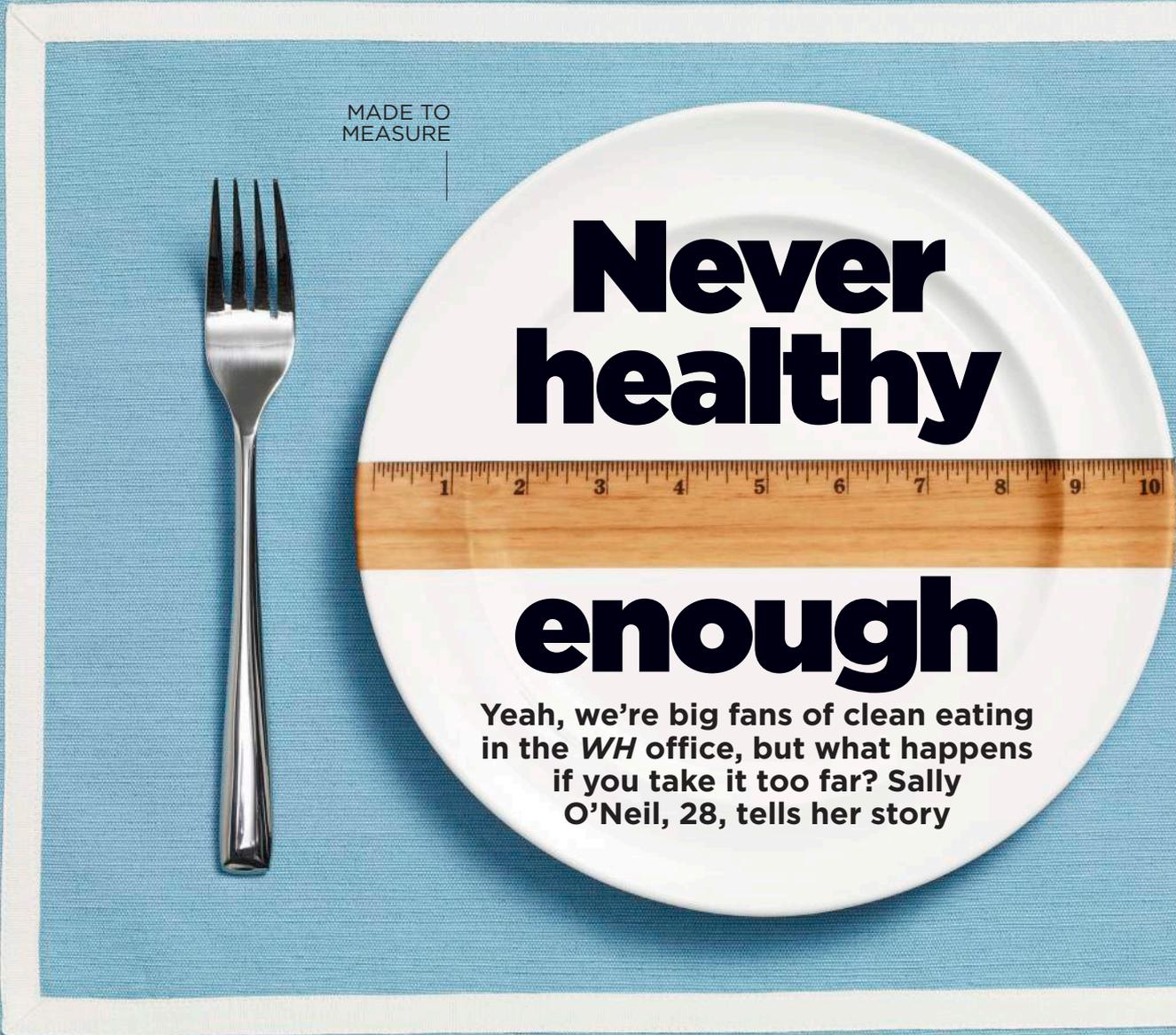


MADE TO  
MEASURE



# Never healthy

# enough

Yeah, we're big fans of clean eating in the *WH* office, but what happens if you take it too far? Sally O'Neil, 28, tells her story

# m

My palms started sweating, my stomach sunk and I wondered, as my breath quickened, whether I was having a panic attack. The reason I was nervier than a yogi testing if her tights are see-through? My mate invited me out for dinner. And I didn't do dinners – or lunch, even – with friends anymore. I hated being that person who had to change everything on their order. I stuck with breakfast dates, where I could order two poached

eggs with grilled tomato (no oil, no salt) without judgement.

I wasn't always so health conscious. Only four years earlier, at home in the UK, my meals would regularly appear pre-prepared in foil trays. Even though my diet wasn't great, I didn't label food as good or bad; it was just food. When my partner and I moved from Yorkshire to Sydney in 2011, things changed. The beach culture and beautiful people combo was the inspiration I needed

to overhaul my health and fitness. I laced up my trainers, hit the gym and started running. I loved how it cleared my head and dulled the feelings of homesickness. As I lost weight from my 165cm frame, I felt proud of my dedication. I began logging my progress on Instagram and got loads of double-taps. I felt empowered, at a time when everything else was uncertain.

I wanted to take my health to the next level; so I had to learn to cook. Several



clean. In the New Year, my partner and I made a resolution to quit sugar. The discipline felt good. Slowly though, something changed. I was beyond committed: when I needed groceries, I'd run across town to the furthest store so I could get the extra incidental exercise in. I worked full-time organising grad placements for a management institute, but rarely missed my two-plus hours daily exercise. The odd day I did skip, I felt anxious and guilty, so vowed not to do it again. How did I stay motivated? Results. I had abs! Finally! Knowing I was making good, super-healthy choices made me feel like the queen of the world, like a better person. I felt secretly superior.

After all, everything I was doing was "pure". Every bite was perfect: poached eggs for breakfast, a piled plate of steamed greens for lunch, herbed salmon and greens for dinner. Life became a maths game of burning and deficits. I was lean, strong and in control – but I was very alone. My choices left me isolated: I considered alcohol and sugar to be poison – hell, anything that wasn't 100 per cent unprocessed was toxic. I couldn't even watch TV on the couch because sitting was a waste of time. Planning workouts and menus were the only things I found joy in.

I finally realised I'd gone too far when I pulled out of a fitness event because I was terrified of wearing the crop top supplied. I remember looking in the mirror and wondering, "How did I get here?" I never wanted to be so thin. Just like the hashtag, the goal was to be strong, not skinny. I felt like a fraud. I looked unwell. My hair was falling out and I had no energy. I was anxious, depressed and exhausted. Then, my period stopped. My doctor told me my BMI had fallen to 14.5, 3.5 points below the official "underweight" classification and I was diagnosed with anorexia.

I was horrified. It made no sense. I wasn't obsessed with my weight. I ate

healthily and my plates were piled high. I never skipped meals. I didn't hide food. My GP, then dietitian, told me I had to eat more, and more frequently. The idea of eating a sugary bran muffin or bowl of packet muesli, as they suggested, was enough to make me freak. But a small part of me knew I had to get a grip.

I did some research and came across the term orthorexia, which is an obsession with healthy or "correct" eating. It described exactly what I was experiencing. At first you might appear strong and vibrant. But, you're constantly battling your own thoughts, and your behaviour becomes restrictive.

Though orthorexia isn't yet classified as a clinical disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), medical experts and The Butterfly Foundation are beginning to recognise it. My psychologist confirmed what I suspected. After

about six months of self-work and sports nutrition study, I went from considering sweet potatoes as sugary carbs to vitamin-packed fuel. I started treating myself – without fear or guilt – to the things I'd deprived myself of. Cakes and carbs made my menu. I re-entered the healthy BMI range feeling good in my body. Now I work out four times a week. I post a workout selfie maybe

three times a year. I'm not trying to achieve perfection or encourage others to do the same.

But the biggest change has been my feelings around food. My mindset has shifted from kilojoule counts to nutrient density and I don't need to know every ingredient in something before I eat it. My blog is about nutritious takes on indulgences, so your body can benefit from them. Carrot cake, brownies, ice-cream – nothing is off-limits anymore. That goes for dinner invitations, too.

**Love Your Body Week – for body image and eating disorder awareness, runs during the first week of September. Visit [thebutterflyfoundation.org.au](http://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au). Follow Sally: [the-fit-foodie.com](http://the-fit-foodie.com), Instagram @thefitfoodieblog. WH**

**"I WAS LEAN,  
STRONG  
AND IN  
CONTROL  
– BUT I  
WAS VERY  
ALONE"**

calls to my mum later, I was armed with recipes for meals I'd grown up with – lasagne, chicken pie, apple crumble. But as I checked out the ingredients, I was shocked. So I started googling alternatives and swapping cream, butter and sugar for yoghurt, coconut oil and stevia. As I gave indulgent recipes healthy makeovers, I felt a surge of pride.

I was toning up, finding extra energy and my IBS improved, but I wanted more – more pure, more raw, more