# Comedian Dave Chawner opens up about his battle with anorexia



A 36-year-old comedian from Burton-on-Trent, Dave Chawner, has shared his personal battle with anorexia, revealing that the condition was significantly influenced by societal praise for his weight loss. Chawner's openness comes in the wake of Olympic diver Tom Daley discussing his struggles with body dysmorphia and bulimia ahead of an upcoming documentary.

In recounting his experience, Chawner described his anorexia as a "passive suicide attempt," using his physical appearance to communicate his internal turmoil. He engaged in behaviours such as skipping university classes to weigh himself, understanding on some level that this was abnormal, yet justifying it as a peculiar quirk, analogous to the rationalisations made by other addicts. Compounding his condition, he felt a false sense of "power and superiority" from his ability to restrict his eating, despite the pleas from friends and family encouraging him to seek help.

Chawner reached a turning point when a nurse intervened, leading to two and a half years of outpatient care. Now in recovery, he actively collaborates with the eating disorder charity Beat and teaches a mental health-focused comedy course aimed at individuals facing similar challenges.

He elaborated on his experience, stating, "I think it was more born out of insecurity and striving for an identity... but weight and calories became an obsession." Chawner identified a significant moment in his adolescence that contributed to his condition: as he prepared to leave for university, he experienced a sense of losing control over his environment, turning to food as a means of regaining agency.

Chawner noted the dual impact of physical and mental factors that influenced his journey. He mentioned that compliments about his appearance during his weight loss were detrimental, stating, "When I lost weight, people started giving me compliments, so that fuelled it." Furthermore, he reflected on societal pressures regarding masculinity, noting that his non-conformity to traditional masculine stereotypes led to his own sense of insecurity.

His insights extended beyond his personal narrative. He shared a misconception surrounding anorexia, highlighting moments of binge-eating, which contradict the stereotypical image of the disorder. Reflecting on his teaching role, he recalled instances of embarrassment when he struggled to manage his eating in front of students. However, a significant breakthrough occurred when a colleague, having undergone her own experience with bulimia, approached him with compassion and understanding, prompting him to evaluate his situation more seriously.

Chawner's recovery journey was catalysed by a conversation with a nurse, who compared the necessity of nourishing the body to charging a laptop. This metaphor resonated with him, motivating him to engage sincerely with recovery services and support.

In addition to speaking out about his struggles, Chawner has established an online comedy course specifically designed for individuals experiencing mental health issues. In this course, he aims to build confidence and communication skills, especially targeting men who may feel hesitant to discuss their mental health. Chawner noted, "I think there are a lot of blokes that do want to talk but don't know how to do it."

Tom Quinn, the director of external affairs for Beat, emphasized the widespread nature of eating disorders, debunking the myth that they predominantly affect young white women. He highlighted that approximately 1.25 million individuals in the UK are afflicted by eating disorders, with an estimated one in four being men. Quinn underscored the critical issue of stigma faced by men, commenting that the stereotype can discourage them from seeking help, thereby complicating their recovery process.

This candid sharing of experiences contributes to a growing awareness of the complexities surrounding eating disorders, with both Chawner and Quinn advocating for increased understanding and support across all demographics.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.mhfestival.com/explore/performing-anxiety/interviews/dave-chawner/> - This URL supports Dave Chawner's background as a comedian and mental health campaigner, including his experiences with anorexia and his work with eating disorder charities.
* <https://www.davechawner.co.uk/mental-health-comedy> - This URL provides information on Dave Chawner's use of comedy to address mental health issues, including his work with eating disorders and teaching a mental health-focused comedy course.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqbL-UhhyPk> - This YouTube video features Dave Chawner discussing his battle with anorexia and using comedy to raise awareness about eating disorders.
* <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/> - This URL is for Beat, the UK's eating disorder charity, which Dave Chawner collaborates with and supports in his advocacy work.
* <https://www.priorygroup.com/news/mental-health-statistics> - This URL provides statistics on mental health, including the reluctance of men to discuss their mental health issues, which aligns with Chawner's efforts to encourage men to speak about their mental health.
* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2019-04-10> - This URL from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) discusses loneliness in England, which is relevant to Chawner's use of comedy to bring people together and address mental health issues.