

YOUNG, VULNERABLE & HOOKED ON FASTING SITES

'An obsession that risks lives'

FASTING has become trendy in recent years but eating disorder specialist Marcelle Rose has seen the devastating impact it can have. She said: "Fasting can quickly become obsessive for people with eating disorders as well as having many other psychological and physical effects. "Under-eaters are very prone to depression and panic attacks. Starving yourself often leads to

intense cravings and we see a lot of people developing binge eating disorders as a result. "Blood pressure can also fall to dangerously low levels and consistent under-eating can really affect bones. Any sort of dieting can be harmful but extreme dieting like fasting is something I would never recommend." The London-based

nutritionist, below, called fasting apps "extremely dangerous", adding: "I absolutely would not recommend anybody to use them. "Many of my clients come to me at a point where they have literally tried every diet going, including using fasting apps. Most realise their life is in serious danger and that they need urgent support."

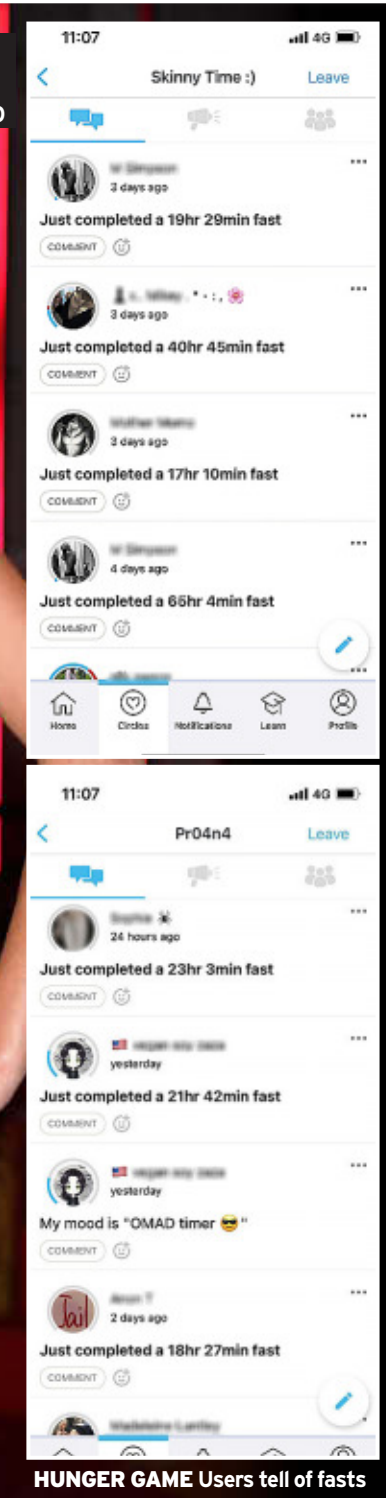


Scrap danger dieting apps

» Users brag of starving for over five days : » Tragic Big Brother star's mum hits out



ORDEAL Nikki Grahame on Ultimate Big Brother in 2010



HUNGER GAME Users tell of fasts

EXCLUSIVE
BY SASKIA ROWLANDS

THE mother of tragic Big Brother star Nikki Grahame is among campaigners calling for a ban on "sick" fasting apps that encourage people who want to lose weight to starve themselves.

Impressionable youngsters – many of them struggling with eating disorders – can download some of the "incredibly dangerous" platforms for free. This newspaper signed up to several apps and uncovered scores of anorexic teens using them – some boasting of going hungry for five days or more. Sue Grahame, whose daughter Nikki died aged 38 in 2021 after a lifelong fight with anorexia, said the apps should be "scrapped". She said: "It's just sick that these apps are even allowed to exist. If people need to lose weight they should go to a registered dietician via their GP. "I've paid the price of my daughter's life through her being so heavily involved in the idea of losing weight, so any app promoting calorie counting and fasting feels so wrong." We explored the apps to mark the end of Eating Disorders Awareness

Week. One free app, Life, let us join without giving our age or medical details. Its Ts & Cs state: "We do not encourage, promote or glorify acts of self-harm." Yet profile pictures featured skeletal selfies and our reporter was bombarded with pro-anorexia content. We even found people plugging potentially lethal "dry fasting" – which means having no food or drink at all. One user boasted of feeling "euphoric" after a 24-hour fast, prompting nine comments, including "I hope I get there one day" and "Congrats!" Fasting Plus, which costs £19.49 for three months, also featured pro-eating disorder content. It let a 5ft 5in woman set a weight loss goal of four stone, giving her a BMI of 9.3. A BMI of 18.5 to 24.9 is ideal for most adults and anything below 15 could indicate potentially fatal anorexia. And we joined free fasting tracker Vora without giving any personal



'IT'S SICK' Nikki's mum Sue Grahame

details. It has no restrictions on the length of time users can fast and a quick search pulled up pro-anorexia accounts. Tom Quinn of eating disorders charity Beat said: "It's appalling that harmful tips for fasting are so readily available without proper checks. "Fasting, restricting food or becoming fixated on diet can be symptoms of an eating disorder and we know weight loss apps can be incredibly dangerous for those affected by these mental illnesses. Apps must remove dangerous content as soon as possible and have strenuous health checks." The Life app is run by medical tech firm Life Omic, of Indianapolis, US. Boss Dr Don Brown has promoted diets of 1,200 calories a day – 1,000 less than the NHS recommends – and brags of doing a five-day fast "at least twice a year". Some 1.2 million Brits have an eating

disorder and anorexia has the highest death rate of all mental illnesses. NHS hospital admissions for eating disorders have also risen 84% in five years – with almost 10,000 children starting treatment from April to December 2021. Data from NHS Digital in October showed 19% of women and 13% of men asked about their food habits screened positive for an eating disorder. The figure was 28% in women under 35. Lisa Huse, of Life Omic, said: "We do not condone unsafe behaviour and have tools to monitor and remove inappropriate groups. We are banning and deleting flagged accounts and content." Fasting Plus said: "Our intermittent fasting app promotes a healthy lifestyle and diet backed up by scientific research and we have helped thousands of people lose weight. "Unfortunately, there will always be people who use it as an excuse for their eating disorders, which is why we use a BMI index to let users know if they lost too much." Vora was contacted for comment. saskia.rowlands@reachplc.com For help on eating disorders, call Beat on 0808 801 0677 or visit beateatingdisorders.org.uk

"I've paid the price of my daughter's life... any app promoting calorie counting and fasting feels so wrong"

Sky the limit in dogs hunt

A DRONE operator has reunited almost 1,400 lost dogs with their owners. Phil James, who runs dog search charity Drone to Home in Woodthorpe, Notts, started out on his own finding dogs by scouring land from above. Now, volunteers help him publicise lost dogs on social media and use their own drones in searches. Kim Platts, whose cocker-poo was found by the charity, said: "We want to say thank you so much."

No lawyers allowed at blood scandal summit, victims told

BY MIKEY SMITH
WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT
VICTIMS of the infected blood scandal have been told their lawyers cannot be at a summit to discuss compensation. An email to campaigners says it will not be "appropriate" at the meeting with Paymaster General Jeremy Quin on Tuesday. Jason Evans, of the Factor 8 group, branded the decision **OUTRAGED** Campaigner Jason



"outrageous". He said: "It's like they're trying to take advantage of sick and dying people... We're not asking for funding, just for lawyers to be in the room." A Cabinet Office spokesperson insisted the meeting is "private". Thousands of people were infected with HIV or hepatitis C by infected blood in the 70s and 80s. At least 2,400 died. The 4,000 survivors only started receiving interim payments last year.



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