UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

01 • MAY ISSUE

THE LAUNCH EDITION

SPRING STYLE WITHOUT LIMITS

Fashion Advice
For Men & Women

SPECIAL EDITION FT FOUNDER'S STORY

MENTAL HEALTH

Breathe With Us

REAL FASHION REAL LIFESTYLE REAL STORIES

REAL STORIES REAL LIVES

Inspiring Stories
From Our Community

THE STORY

How the movement started and why

UNPOUCHED

"WE ARE NOT JUST MEDICAL DEVICES. WE ARE PEOPLE, STORIES, STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE."

WELCOME TO UNPOUCHED

SHARE YOUR STORIES

VOICE YOUR JOURNEY

HELP MAKE A CHANGE.

EMAIL:
UNPOUCHED@GMAIL.COM

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UNPOUCHED

confidence beyond the pouch

VOICES

unfiltered. unseen. finally heard.

> "THIS ISN'T JUST A MAGAZINE — IT'S SOMETHING PEOPLE HAVE NEEDED FOR A LONG TIME."

THIS IS WHERE IT CHANGES.

as **UNPOUCHED** begins to take shape,
one thing is undeniable —
this is more than a magazine.

messages are coming in from everywhere.
different lives, different stories,
but all saying the same thing:
this space has been missing for far too long.

one reader described the feeling of
discovering **UNPOUCHED** as finally seeing
something that reflects real life with an ostomy —
not just the clinical side,
but the confidence, identity,
and lifestyle that comes with it.

his words were simple —
but they carried weight.

a reminder that people
aren't just searching for facts.
they're searching to feel seen.
to feel understood.

not every story can be told in one issue.
but every voice is shaping
what **UNPOUCHED** is becoming.

MORE THAN INFORMATION.
MORE THAN AWARENESS.
WORLDWIDE STORIES

A PUBLICATION, YES —
BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY,
A MOVEMENT.

> "THIS IS A MEANINGFUL AND MUCH-NEEDED INITIATIVE."
> — COMMUNITY VOICE

Written by
Gemma Louise McNamara
for UNPOUCHED

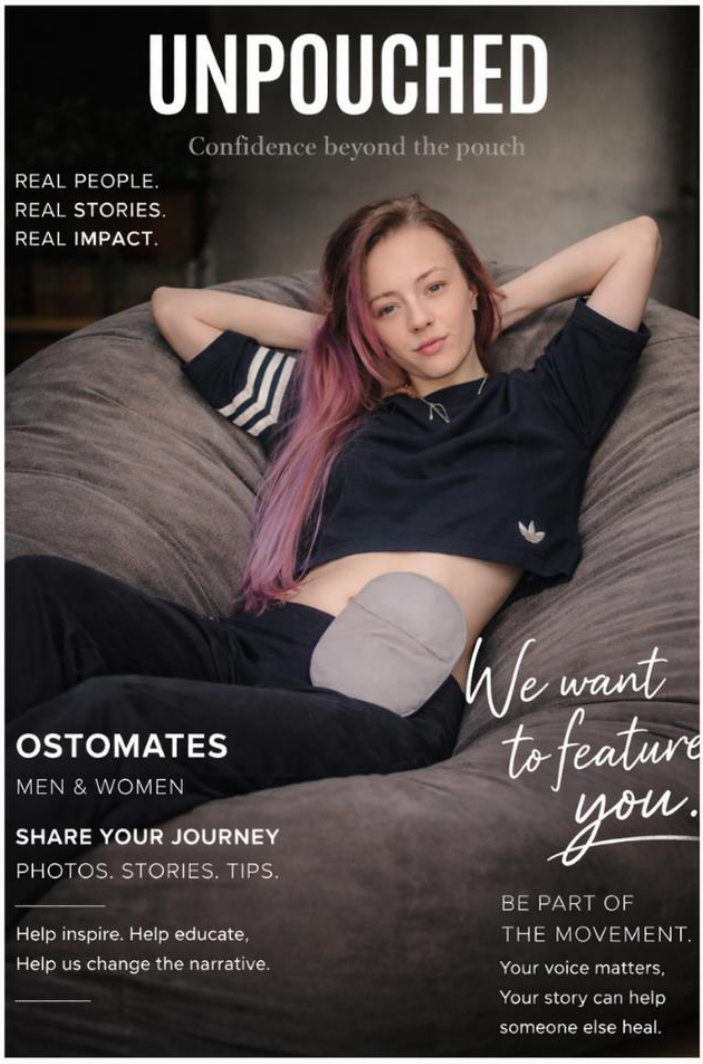
Explore more:
Tom's Journey → tinyurl.com/2jahj3fd

Editor's Letter

MAY 2026

For almost a decade, I've lived with an ostomy and undergone more than 30 operations. Alongside that journey, I've also faced over 20 years of mental health struggles. I have battled a lot in life not just in sickness but in trauma too! **Through it all, one thing became clear to me - no one should feel alone in their story.**

Since the early days of MySpace, I've connected with thousands of people online, helping others living with disabilities and health conditions feel more confident and supported. One question kept coming up again and again from ostomates: **"What do I wear?" That simple question was one of the reasons that inspired the creation of UNPOUCHED.**



FIRST 2 ISSUES FREE ALWAYS IN DIGITAL FORMAT!

Future issues will be £2.49-£3.99.

This magazine is about real people, real bodies, and real confidence.

It's about normalising ostomies, challenging stigma, and s**howing that life doesn't stop because your body changes.** No one is perfect, but everyone deserves to feel confident in their own skin. As an ostomate, I'm also working with others to push for better, more accessible toilet facilities across the UK. It would mean a lot if you could support us by signing our petition.
See Page 51
Thank you.

True. Raw. UNPOUCHED
If our free issues speak to you, back the next issues!

Founder Of **UNPOUCHED**
Written By: Gemma Louise McNamara
aka HarleyQuinnDiesel

FOUNDERS STORY

FROM "DISGUSTING" TO UNPOUCHED - A FOUNDER'S STORY

Before illness rewrote my life, I was unstoppable. Sport was everything to me - football, netball, ice hockey, dancing, taekwondo. I modelled, I moved, I lived fully. I had dreams of becoming a footballer or a dancer. My body was my freedom, my identity, my future. Then, **at 15 years old, everything changed.** I lost everything and everyone - I just kept getting sicker. However I had a new baby brother who became my world. He kept me fighting the hardest days of my life.

I died from sepsis caused by perianal disease. They brought me back but that surgery was only the beginning. What followed was a life I never could have imagined. **One to two operations a year.** Hospital beds instead of dance floors. Pain instead of passion. **I lost everything - my friends, my independence, my dreams.** I became bed-bound, unable to sit or walk because of ongoing complications. **Over time, those surgeries added up to more than 30.** And that was just one part of the battle.

Alongside Crohn's disease and severe perianal disease, I've lived with fibromyalgia, arthritis, hemiplegic migraines, HS and more still being diagnosed. **I'm autistic, with sensory issues that made even basic bodily functions overwhelming**. On top of that came C-PTSD, anxiety, and severe depression - built not just from illness, but from years of trauma, abuse, and being **failed by people who were supposed to help and love me.**

I lost more than my health. I lost parts of my future. **I've lost both of my fallopian tubes and one ovary.** I've lost pregnancies. My first pregnancy at 17 killed me - I survived through emergency surgery and blood transfusions. I always dreamed of having children of my own, especially after helping raise my younger brothers and working with kids too. **That dream was taken from me also.** My body has always felt like it's fighting me. But nothing prepared me for my lowest moment. The day I got my stoma.

After years of my body trying to kill me through recurring infections and surgeries, I was told I needed an ileostomy - **my bowels were 90% diseased.** At the time, I was in an abusive relationship, and my mum pushed me to have the surgery and move back home, saying it would keep me safe. **Then something unexpected happened - I fell pregnant with twins and went into remission.** For the first time in years, my body felt strong. The surgery was no longer urgent. But that was taken from me. I lost the pregnancy through abuse - my only healthy one.

Years later, after leaving that relationship, **I finally had my ostomy surgery while in a safer, more supportive place.** But on the day of the operation, my mum wasn't the person she promised she would be. **The day I woke up I was terrified.** I looked down and saw a bag filled with blood and waste, tubes everywhere, my body unrecognisable. I was in pain, confused, and **all I wanted was comfort.** All I wanted was my mum. My mum walked in, looked at me, heaved and said one word: **"Disgusting."** Then she walked out. That moment completely broke something in me.

"I rebuilt myself and turned survival into a movement."

CONTINUE FOUNDER'S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE

FOUNDERS STORY CONTINUED

For six years, I couldn't change my own stoma bag. I would cry, scream, panic - every single time. Being autistic, I already struggled with sensory overload, and seeing my intestine, hearing it, dealing with output - **it was overwhelming beyond words.** That one moment planted a belief in me that took years to undo. But slowly... I did undo it. **I learned to accept it. Then I learned to live with it. And eventually - I learned to love the body that kept me alive.**

The bag was never the real issue. It was the shame attached to it. And that shame didn't just come from one moment. **I was bullied online, publicly by grown adults, even medical professionals. Mocked for wearing stoma bag covers.** Told I was treating it like a handbag. I was body-shamed, laughed at, dismissed - just like my trauma is.

I've been **challenged for using disabled toilets,** forced to prove my illness by lifting my clothes in public. Told I didn't "look disabled enough." But here's the truth people still struggle to understand: **Disability doesn't always look like what you expect. And sometimes, the systems that are meant to protect you are the ones that harm you.**

I've even been hurt by police officers. My disability car was taken from me after they issued a Section 59 for alleged speeding - **something physically impossible for me at the time.** I had open wounds, severe perianal disease, and could barely sit, let alone drive recklessly. They stopped us in slow-moving traffic and treated me with complete disregard for my condition. The police officer said I didn't deserve a top of the range Audi! **Despite visible medical needs, I was forced to walk 45 minutes home - dripping stoma bag, open wounds, in pain, humiliated. That night broke me in a different way.**

Losing my car didn't just take away transport - it took away my independence, my access to healthcare, my ability to attend life-saving appointments. **My world froze for five years. I stopped going out. I missed treatments. My health declined even further.** I tried to fight it, but the system was exhausting. Draining. Impossible to win against. So I waited. Five years to be "allowed" back to a life I never should have lost. I can't use public transport for multiple reasons. **Experiences like that change you. They either silence you or they force you to find your voice.** For a long time, I stayed quiet. Until I didn't. Keeping everything in takes a toll.

I **recently experienced a nervous system collapse** from trauma on top of ongoing physical pain - it was one of the most frightening moments of my life. I genuinely thought I was going to die again. With no family support - my late nan was the only one I had there for me - I had to pull myself through this one. **I felt exhausted, overwhelmed, and alone.** But I held onto the support I do have, from my carer, my online family and to my faith. And over time, I've learned this: don't let the bad words in. Protect your brain. Protect your gut. Voice your pain, your story and help others.

CONTINUE FOUNDER'S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE

FOUNDERS STORY *CONTINUED...*

Helping people has always been my anchor. From the early days of MySpace, I was supporting others with illness and disability. **It gave me purpose when everything else felt out of control.** I built a following of over 36,000 people - sharing, empowering, showing real life with a stoma. Dancing with my bag visible. Owning it. Normalising it. Then **overnight, it was gone. My platform was taken down, and with it, everything I had built.**

And I had a choice: Stay silent again or rebuild differently. **I chose differently.** I didn't want to go back to chasing social media. That's never been who I am. **I'm someone who creates, who builds, who tells stories.**

So I asked myself one simple question:
How can I still help people - without
losing myself in the process?

That's where **UNPOUCHED** was born. I saw a gap that couldn't be ignored. **Representation in the ostomy world felt outdated, clinical, and often negative.** It didn't reflect real people, real bodies, real lives. So I created something that would. **UNPOUCHED is more than a magazine.**

"Being a disabled founder means I don't build from theory – I build from lived reality. That's where real change starts."

UNPOUCHED is more than a magazine. It's a movement. A space for unfiltered truth, for fashion, lifestyle, mental health, and real stories. For the good, the bad, and everything in between. It's for the person awaiting surgery, terrified of what's coming. It's for the person learning to live again after it. It's for anyone who has ever felt ashamed of their body.

Since creating **UNPOUCHED**, something shifted in me. **For the first time in a long time - I wake up excited. I have purpose again. This is what I'm here to do. To give people a voice.** To make them feel seen. To remind them they are not alone. Because they're not. And they never will be again. **UNPOUCHED**'s future vision: print, representation, and runway.

From being made to feel 'disgusting' to creating **UNPOUCHED** - I turned shame into a movement. I never minded the actual bag itself. From day one, I was helping others feel confident - showing what you can wear, how you can move, how life doesn't stop with an ostomy. **I even taught women with ostomies how to feel sexy again, helping them rebuild confidence and reconnect with their bodies. That's why I'm especially excited for our Valentine's special next year.**

I'm also now writing a series of books - unfiltered, experience-led, and rooted in trauma, healing, and rebuilding from the ground up. What you've read here is only one chapter of my life.

UNPOUCHED is part of my story. Not all of it.
If you want to follow all of my story throughout life please follow my socials. I aim to help heal people from trauma quicker than I did in my future books.

To every ostomate reading this - be patient with yourself. You are not less than, you are not finished, and you are not alone. This life is still yours, and it still holds everything ahead of you.

And finally a big shout to my carer, Scott. I wouldn't be here without him. When I had no support after everything I'd been through, he stepped in when I needed it most. I'm genuinely grateful. That's also why I've given him a voice on this platform. He now runs our **UNPOUCHED** Carers - a space dedicated to carers, giving them the recognition, honesty, and voice they deserve.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

"My journey isn't over - 30 surgeries behind me and more ahead. But I stand stronger than ever, carried by a community that never lets me walk alone. Together, we rise, we fight, and we keep going."

I hope you continue reading and join the movement - **UNPOUCHED**. Now let's talk fashion, lifestyle, and real stories.

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

"A stoma was the last thing I ever wanted.I said no eight times."

FROM NEAR DEATH TO ENTREPRENEUR

"I wanted to create something people could actually enjoy wearing.

Something that helps them feel more like themselves again."

Meet Ryan, a young entrepreneur redefining survival. Raw. Powerful. Limitless.

STOMASTYLES

UNPOUCHED
Confidence beyond the pouch

FROM NEAR DEATH TO ENTREPRENEUR REBUILT WITH PURPOSE

STOMASTYLES

UNPOUCHED FEATURE | ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHOUT LIMITS

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

HOW RYAN BUILT A BUSINESS AFTER BEATING DEATH

Ryan is 26. He's been living with a stoma for five years. But that's not what defines him. What defines him is what he built after nearly losing everything.

TWO WEEKS TO LIVE - AND STILL SAYING NO.

Ryan didn't accept a stoma easily. He rejected it eight times. **"A stoma was the last thing I ever wanted. I said no eight times."** It wasn't denial - it was fear. Real, human fear of the unknown, of change, of what life would look like after. But things escalated. Doctors gave it to him straight: two weeks to live without the surgery. **"Even then, I still didn't want it. The only reason I said yes was because I could see what it was doing to my family."** That decision didn't just save his life. It gave him a completely new one.

What Ryan feared the most became the thing that freed him. **"Almost immediately after surgery, I felt better - physically and mentally. It felt like a weight had been lifted."** Before the operation, life was reduced to survival.

Bed-bound. Isolated. Limited. After? Movement. Energy. Possibility. **"I could go out again. I could work. I could go to the gym. I could actually live."** The stoma bag - the thing he fought against - became the very thing that gave him his life back. **"It's one of the best things that ever happened to me."**

That's not a sentence people expect to hear. But it's real. **"It's terrifying when you're facing it, I understand that. But I didn't realise how much freedom it would give me. I'm genuinely grateful for it."** That shift - from fear to gratitude - is where everything changed. Because once Ryan got his life back, he didn't just stop there. He built something with it.

CONTINUE RYAN'S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE

"A STOMA WAS THE LAST THING I EVER WANTED. I SAID NO EIGHT TIMES!"

FROM NEAR DEATH TO ENTREPRENEUR REBUILT WITH PURPOSE

STOMASTYLES

UNPOUCHED FEATURE | ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHOUT LIMITS

CONTINUED

FROM EXPERIENCE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Ryan noticed something most people overlook. Living with a stoma isn't just physical - it's confidence, identity, and how you feel in your own skin.

"Confidence is one of the biggest struggles. It's not just physical - it's mental, emotional, and social too."

That insight became an opportunity. Not in a transactional way - but in a meaningful one. That's where StomaStyles was born.

What started as a simple idea quickly became something bigger. Ryan began creating stoma bag covers - not just for function, but for confidence. **"I wanted to create something people could actually enjoy wearing. Something that helps them feel more like themselves again."**

Now? **Over 200 designs. A growing business. A real impact.** Because something as small as how you feel in your clothes - can change how you show up in your life.

"Whether it's going to the beach, wearing certain clothes, or just feeling less self-conscious day-to-day - those small things matter."

THIS ISN'T A PATIENT STORY - THIS IS A BUILDER'S MINDSET

Ryan didn't just adapt to life with a stoma. He used it. He turned experience into purpose. Struggle into strategy. Survival into something scalable.

"If I can make even a small part of someone's journey easier, then it's all been worth it."

That's not just resilience. That's entrepreneurship.

DON'T LET FEAR STOP YOU FROM GETTING YOUR LIFE BACK.

Ryan knows exactly how heavy that decision feels. Which is why his message is direct: **"I won't lie - it's scary. But don't let fear of the unknown stop you from getting your life back."**
Because on the other side of that fear?
Is possibility. CONTINUE RYAN'S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE

FROM NEAR DEATH TO ENTREPRENEUR

REBUILT WITH PURPOSE

STOMASTYLES

UNPOUCHED FEATURE | ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHOUT LIMITS

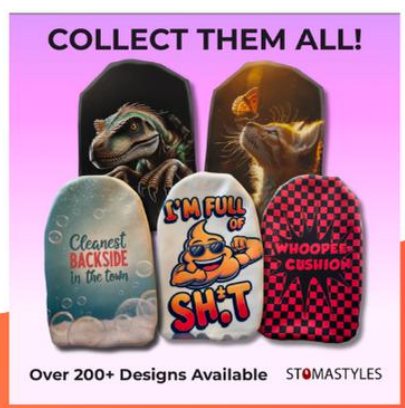
StomaStyles isn't just a brand - it's confidence, identity, and representation in real life.

Ryan didn't just rebuild his life. He built something that helps others rebuild theirs too. Go support his business. Explore the designs. Be part of what he's building.

Because backing disabled entrepreneurs isn't about sympathy - it's about recognising innovation, resilience, and vision.

Ryan's story proves something powerful: **Being disabled does not define your limits. Your mindset does. Your work ethic does. Your actions do.** He was given two weeks to live. He made a decision. And then he built a business. You can still be anything. You can still do anything. But you have to work for it. And Ryan? He's already proving that. This is what it means to be **UNPOUCHED.**

FOLLOW STOMASTYLES



WWW.STOMASTYLES.COM

“DRESS UP YOUR MIND AND YOU’LL BE ABLE TO MAKE ALL SORTS OF FASHION STATEMENTS”

UNPOUCHED

COLOURS OF THE SEASON
FOR MEN

OLIVE GREEN

CHERRY RED

CERULEAN BLUE

COLOURS OF SPRING 2026

By Gemma Louise McNamara for UNPOUCHED

This spring, men's style is all about bold but wearable colour. Olive green stays a go-to neutral for jackets and cargos, cerulean blue keeps things fresh in shirts and layers, while cherry red adds a sharp pop through tees or trainers. It's clean, confident, and easy to mix.

For men with ostomy wear, it's about dressing smart with purpose. Go for looser fits that sit clean on the body without clinging, breathable fabrics that keep things comfortable, and waistlines with a bit of give. Longer cuts and simple layering help everything sit properly and stay discreet, keeping the overall look elevated, polished, and intentionally styled.

COLOURS OF THE SEASON
FOR WOMEN

SAGE GREEN

BUTTER YELLOW

BLUSH PINK

COLOURS OF SPRING 2026

By Gemma Louise McNamara for UNPOUCHED

This spring, women's fashion moves into a soft, refined palette. Sage green brings a calm, grounded edge to tailoring and everyday staples, butter yellow introduces a gentle warmth across dresses and light knits, while blush pink adds a clean, modern softness that works across both casual and elevated pieces.

For women incorporating ostomy wear, comfort and silhouette go hand in hand. Think crop tops balanced with high-waisted, loose-fitting trousers, light cardigans, and soft layers that move with the body rather than restrict it. Breathable fabrics keep things easy, while thoughtful cuts help everything sit smoothly and discreetly.

THE SPRING EDIT

This season is defined by ease - softer structure, and relaxed silhouettes, and **pieces that move with you rather than restrict you.**

Style is shifting away from rigid tailoring and into something more wearable, more considered, and more personal. For ostomates, this evolution in fashion works in your favour. Spring 2026 is not about hiding the body - it's about working with it.

Choosing pieces that offer comfort, flexibility, and confidence, without compromising on aesthetic.

FOR WOMEN

This season leans into fluidity and balance. High-waisted trousers and skirts remain key - offering natural support while creating a clean, elongated silhouette. Soft tailoring, particularly in blazers and co-ords, allows structure without stiffness. Lightweight knitwear, oversized shirts, and wrap styles create movement through the body, avoiding restriction while still feeling styled. Dresses follow the same direction: midi lengths, and relaxed fits. **The focus is simple - shape without pressure, structure without discomfort.**

FOR MEN

Menswear continues to **embrace relaxed refinement.** Trousers are looser, waistbands softer, and silhouettes more forgiving - making them ideal for everyday comfort. Cargo styles, pleated trousers, and elasticated waists offer both practicality and a modern edge. Layering is essential. Overshirts, lightweight jackets, and boxy tees **create dimension without adding bulk or pressure.**

Key Pieces to Invest In:

- **Relaxed blazer**
  (soft structure, easy layering)
- **Wide-leg or pleated trousers**
  (comfort + movement)
- **Lightweight knitwear**
  (breathable, flexible)
- **Oversized shirts**
  (effortless styling)
- **Elasticated or high waists**
  (support without restriction)

Great style isn't about forcing your body into clothes. It's about choosing clothes that work with your body.

When comfort and confidence align, everything changes — how you move, how you feel, and how you present yourself.

Because the best - dressed person in the room isn't the one following trends. It's the one who feels completely at ease in what they're wearing.

The key shift is towards clothing that adapts - pieces that sit naturally on the body, rather than needing to be adjusted throughout the day.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for UNPOUCHED

STYLE WITHOUT LIMITS

Fashion has always been about expression but for many, it becomes something else entirely. A negotiation. A compromise. A question of what feels “safe” rather than what feels right. **UNPOUCHED** exists to challenge that. Living with an ostomy changes your body, but it does not diminish your ability to **show up with presence, style, and confidence.**

If anything, it sharpens it. It forces intention. It redefines what it means to dress for yourself. This is where style evolves. Rethinking the Silhouette. The conversation isn’t about hiding - it’s about understanding. **High-waisted trousers and skirts offer natural support** while creating clean, structured lines. Relaxed tailoring introduces shape without restriction.

Layering becomes a tool, not a shield - adding depth, movement, and control over how an outfit sits and feels. The modern silhouette is not tight or oversized for the sake of trend. It’s considered. Balanced. Functional. What you wear should move with you.

Soft knits, breathable cottons, and flexible waistbands **allow comfort to exist alongside style. Structured pieces should feel supportive, not restrictive.** Every detail - from seams to stretch - plays a role in how confident you feel throughout the day. Because when something feels right, it looks right.

There is a difference between getting dressed and styling yourself.

Styling is about choice, about deciding how you want to be seen.

A layered shirt left slightly open. A waistband that sits exactly where it feels secure. A blazer that sharpens the look without overwhelming it. These are small decisions - but they build a strong presence. Confidence isn’t about ignoring your body. It’s about understanding it - and working with it, not against it. There will be days where dressing feels effortless. And days where it doesn’t. Both are valid. But style becomes powerful when it stops being about covering up, and starts being about showing up - fully, honestly, and without apology. **Style was never the limitation. The shift is in how you see yourself.**

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

3 WAYS TO WEAR SAGE GREEN

OUR FAVOURITE UNISEX COLOUR OF SPRING 2026

One colour - Three identities - Endless Possibilities.

Casual
Oversized Hoodie, Relaxed Trousers, Clean Trainers. Effortless, Everyday Confidence

Elevated
Structured Blazer, Fitted top, tailored trousers. Clean lines. Strong Silhouette.

Streetwear
Layered Tee, Cargo Trousers, Statement Trainers. Modern, Expressive, Unapologetic.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for UNPOUCHED

THE RESET

TRUE CONFIDENCE ISN'T CONSTANT. IT'S SOMETHING YOU RETURN TO.

Slow mornings.
Comfortable clothing.
Moments of stillness.

A reset isn't about doing more - it's about creating space to feel grounded again.

Because how you feel always reflects in how you show up.

> "Confidence begins in stillness."

RESET TIP

Give yourself permission to slow down. You don't have to earn rest, You deserve it.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE RITUALS

CONFIENCE ISN'T BUILT IN ONE MOMENT. IT'S BUILT IN SMALL, CONSISTENT CHOICES.

DRESS IN A WAY THAT FEELS RIGHT

Wear what fits your body, your lifestyle and your energy - not just what looks good.

TAKE TIME TO PREPARE NOT RUSH

A few extra minutes can change your whole day. Preparation creates presence.

MOVE YOUR BODY, EVEN GENTLY

Movement boosts your mood, your energy and your mindset.

SPEAK TO YOURSELF WITH INTENTION

Your inner dialogue shapes everything. Be kind. Be real. Be your biggest supporter.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for UNPOUCHED

> “Confidence is created in the moment no one sees.”

UNPOUCHED

Founder's Photo

Next we take a dive into the lives of other ostomates.

The good, the bad & the ugly. Pure Unfiltered Truths.

Get ready for:
REAL STORIES.
REAL BODIES.
REAL LIVES.

REAL STORIES

"Ostomy life doesn't mean giving up, it means redefining and continuing to live life on your terms."

UNPOUCHED

confidence beyond the pouch

"YOUR STORY MATTERS.

EVERY PART OF IT.

THE GOOD, AND THE BAD, THE REAL.

♥

SPEAK YOUR TRUTH. INSPIRE OTHERS.

Whether your journey has been ups and downs,
full of wins or still a work in progress —
your voice has the power to comfort,
empower, and connect.
You never know who needs to hear it.

SHARE YOUR JOURNEY.
BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION.

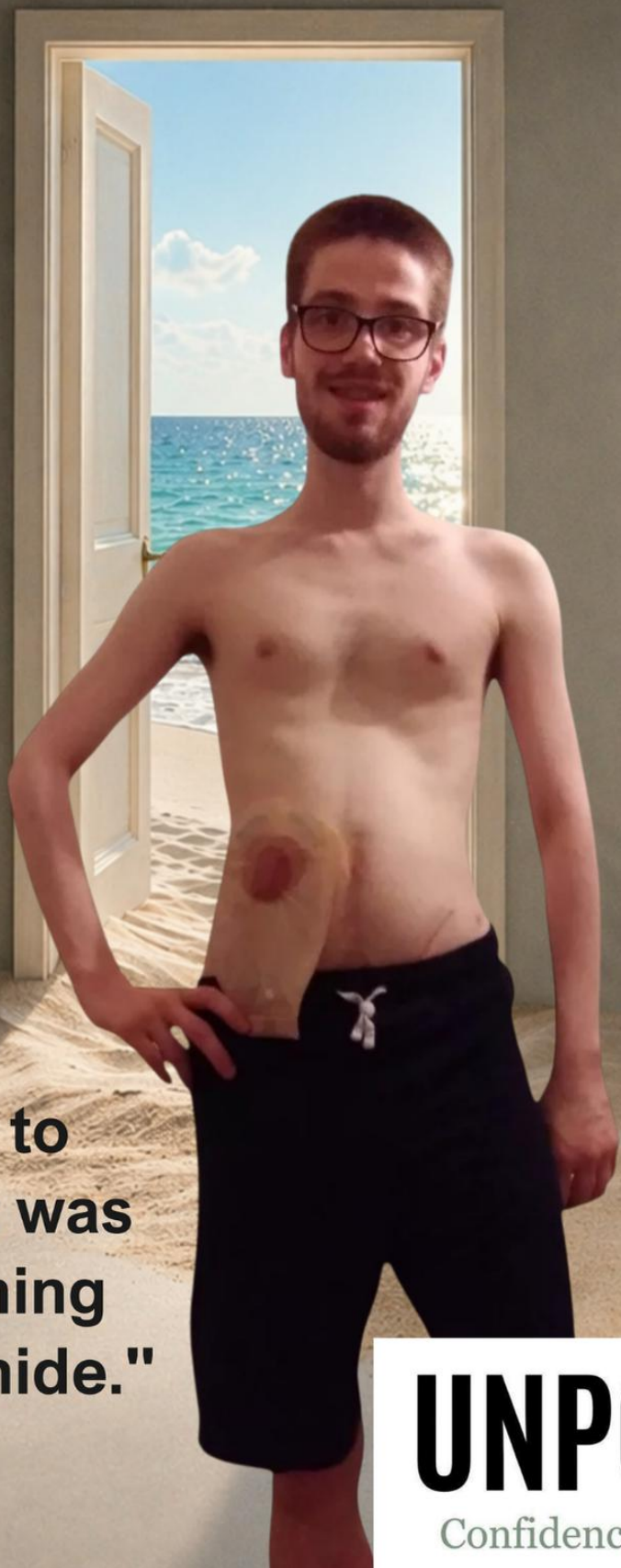
REAL STORIES. REAL VOICES. REAL IMPACT.

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

NATHAN

Nathan Coupland on growing up with a stoma, silence and learning to own his story.



"I've never known life without my stoma - it's always been part of me."

"I was taught to hide it - but it was never something I could truly hide."

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

NATHAN

BORN RESILIENT

For Nathan Coupland, life with a stoma isn’t something that began with diagnosis - it’s something that has always been part of him. After becoming unwell as a baby and repeatedly returning to hospital unable to keep food or water down, doctors discovered he had Hirschsprung disease - meaning he needed a stoma from the very start of his life.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

NATHAN COUPLAND ON GROWING UP WITH A STOMA, SILENCE AND LEARNING TO OWN HIS STORY.

After multiple surgeries and attempted reversals growing up, Nathan was later offered an alternative - an ACE procedure. But the reality of it, from daily management to the risk of complications, didn’t feel like freedom. **“I just thought... I can’t deal with that. It felt like more hard work than a stoma,”** he says. **“Honestly, I’m happy with my bag.”** Growing up, however, came with challenges that had nothing to do with surgery - and everything to do with silence. **“I was always told not to tell anyone. Just keep it quiet.”** But school environments made that almost impossible. From changing rooms to swimming lessons, Nathan found himself trying to hide something that couldn’t be hidden. **“It was embarrassing. People noticed and sometimes they were disgusted.”**

He said **“I was taught to hide it - but it was never something I could truly hide.”** As he got older, his mindset began to shift. **“I stopped caring as much - but relationships were still hard.”** Trust became everything. Knowing when to tell someone,explaining his needs, even navigating food and social situations- it all carried weight. **“I would only tell people if I trusted them. But when people understand, that’s everything. Telling someone isn’t just honesty it’s trust.”**

Alongside this, Nathan faced his own mental health challenges - especially during school years, where even small things like his bag making noise in a quiet room felt overwhelming.

“The hardest part was trying not to draw attention.” Over time, he found his escape in music. “Music and singing - that’s my thing.” Through the All Included Music Project (AIMP), Nathan found both support and confidence - crediting the group and its leader, Chris Dark, for helping him along his journey. **“Music gave me a voice when I didn’t know how to use my own.”**

Today, Nathan stands in a place of acceptance and pride. “I love my stoma. It will always be part of my life. I embrace it.” No longer hiding, he’s open to conversation. **“I don’t hide it anymore - I embrace it.”** Looking back, his message is clear:

“Don’t be afraid. Better things will come - just embrace who you are.” And for others: “We’re the same as you in everyway. Stop judging people - you don’t know what they’re going through.”

His advice: **“Just learn to love and respect each other - the world would be a much better place.”**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

Alexandra Jane and her life-changing diagnosis at 28 now she's changing the conversation.

"Bowel cancer doesn't just affect older people."

"Stomas aren't something to be ashamed of."

ALEXANDRA

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

ALEXANDRA JANE

U N S T O P P A B L E

At just 28 years old, only days after celebrating her birthday, everything changed. Four days after turning 28 in September last year, she was diagnosed with stage 3 bowel cancer - a life-altering moment that no one, especially someone so young, expects.

DIAGNOSED WITH STAGE 3 BOWEL CANCER AT 28, SHE FACED SILENCE, SURVIVAL, AND A PERMANENT STOMA.

What followed was a whirlwind of hospital appointments, decisions, and the kind of strength you don't know you have until you're forced to find it. Because of the tumour's location, **life-saving treatment meant undergoing major surgery that resulted in a permanent stoma.** Alongside this, she faced chemotherapy — physically and emotionally demanding, pushing her to her limits. But this is not just a story about illness. It's a story about survival. **Now in remission, she stands on the other side of one of life's toughest battles — not just as a survivor, but as someone determined to make a difference.** Living with a stoma bag has become part of her everyday reality, and **instead of hiding it, she's choosing to speak out.** ***"I really want to get involved with projects that raise awareness,"*** she shares — ***"especially for young people, - because bowel cancer doesn't just affect older generations."*** Because stomas aren't something to be ashamed of, because representation matters! **Her voice is part of a growing movement that refuses to stay silent** - challenging stigma, breaking down misconceptions, and showing the world that life after diagnosis, after surgery, after a stoma... is still powerful, still beautiful, and still worth celebrating.

This is what resilience looks like.

This is what courage looks like.

This is what being UNPOUCHED truly means.

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

Jenna, 38, is an Ileostomy Advocate and National Diversity Award nominee using her story to raise awareness.

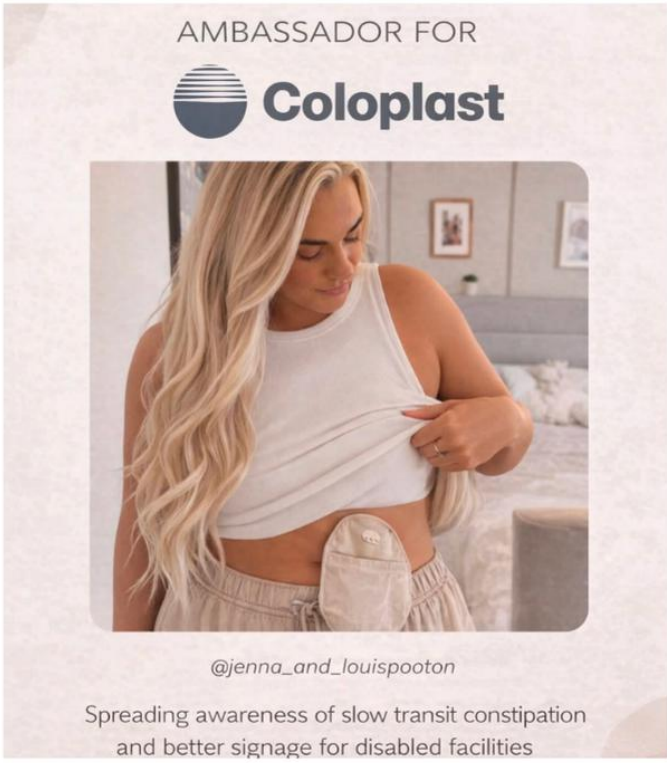
"My Ileostomy gave me my life back."

"I waited eight years for hope. Now I want to be that hope for someone else."

JENNA

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch



JENNA

LIBERATED

“It Changed Everything” - severe slow transit constipation to living life well. From silent suffering to a life reclaimed: Jenna’s journey with an Ileostomy. “I waited eight years for hope. Now I want to be that hope for someone else.”

“It Changed Everything.” - **severe slow transit constipation** to living life well. From silent suffering to a life reclaimed and liberated - Here is Jenna’s journey with an Ileostomy. ***“I waited eight years for hope. Now I want to be that hope for someone else.”*** Jenna, 38, spent nearly a decade living with **severe slow transit constipation** - a condition that left her unable to go to the toilet for up to nine days at a time. ***“I tried everything - laxatives, anal irrigation, Botox, endless tests. Nothing worked.”*** Her symptoms began after the birth of her daughter following a C-section. What started as post-surgical constipation quickly became something far more serious. Despite extensive testing, including for Crohn’s and colitis, results always came back clear. ***“I just wanted answers, but nobody could give me any.” “It felt like my life was shrinking.”*** Alongside this, Jenna was diagnosed with **functional neurological disorder and fibromyalgia** - conditions that worsened her symptoms and left her in constant pain. She experienced chronic fissures, piles, bloating, and the ongoing feeling of never fully emptying her bowels. **The impact on her mental health was profound.** ***“I would have panic attacks before going to the toilet because I knew what it would involve - the pain, the bleeding. It was terrifying.”*** Daily life became a cycle of planning around toilets and managing discomfort. ***“I even had to leave a family trip to the seaside early because the pain was so bad.” “It was controlling my life.”*** After years of failed treatments and invasive procedures, **Jenna reached breaking point.** In November 2025, she underwent surgery for a loop ileostomy. The result was life-changing. ***“It was like someone waved a magic wand, The pain and discomfort started to disappear.”***

“My ileostomy gave me my life back.”

CONTINUE JENNA’S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

JENNA CONTINUED....

While adjusting to life with a stoma brought new challenges, Jenna says they are nothing compared to what she endured before. ***"I would take this life any day over the one I had."*** She also credits a change in consultant as a turning point. ***"She listened to me, understood me, and took my symptoms seriously. That changed everything."*** Although other therapies were explored, including pelvic floor training, **surgery ultimately gave Jenna the quality of life she had been searching for.** ***"I don't see a reversal in my future. I finally feel well." "I'm finally living, not just surviving."*** Now, Jenna is using her experience to help others. She is working with **Colostomy UK** to raise awareness of stomas, hidden disabilities, and the need for better public facilities. Simple adjustments - like a hook on a toilet door or a small shelf can make a huge difference, yet many places still lack these basic features.

"A lot of people don't understand what a stoma is or what we need." Jenna has also experienced first-hand the stigma surrounding hidden disabilities. At a visit to York Opera House, she urgently needed to use the toilet to empty her stoma bag but was **refused help**. ***"I explained I had a stoma and that it was urgent. The response I got was, 'It's not a competition.'" "It's not a competition but it is my reality."*** Moments like this highlight the importance of greater awareness and compassion. Jenna has shared her story widely, **appearing in national newspapers, on radio, and on ITV News. She is also a nominee for a National Diversity Award, recognising her efforts to advocate for others.** But for Jenna, the mission is simple. ***"I don't want anyone else to wait eight years like I did." "There needs to be more awareness. This condition isn't talked about but it should be."*** By speaking out, **Jenna hopes to shine a light on a condition that is often overlooked and misunderstood** and to remind others that they are not alone. ***"I found my answer. Now I want to help others find theirs."***

Jenna has recently helped transform the Hull Kingston Rovers stadium into a stoma-friendly space - successfully pushing for the addition of hooks, practical shelving, and a full-length mirror to better support ostomates on match days.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

At just 16 years old, Emma's life changed in a way most teenagers could never imagine. Awarded a BBC Make A Difference Award for bravery, recognising both her resilience and powerful voice.

"It was a life or death sitaution - my stoma surgery saved my life."

"I want to be that helping hand for others... I want people to feel seen, heard and less alone."

EMMA

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

"My Stoma Saved My Life": Emma's Story of Survival, Strength, and Second Chances.

EMMA SELLARS

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

At just 16 years old, Emma's life changed in a way most teenagers could never imagine. Diagnosed with **Ulcerative Colitis,** she was suddenly thrust into a world of hospitals, medications, and relentless symptoms that would come to define her daily existence for years. What followed was not just a battle with illness - but a fight for survival. **Emma's condition quickly escalated beyond what standard treatments could control.** Years were spent cycling through medications: steroids, infusions, chemotherapy drugs, and injections - each bringing their own harsh side effects, yet failing to stop the disease. The flares were constant. The pain was severe. The bleeding was relentless - sometimes **so extreme that it required blood transfusions.**

"My toilet trips went right up to 40–50 times a day... I was so weak and malnourished."

Alongside the physical toll came the emotional weight. **Nausea, sickness, and intense abdominal pain became routine**. Hair loss from chemotherapy medications and the inability to properly absorb nutrients left Emma's body depleted and exhausted. At an age when life should have been opening up, hers felt like it was closing in. By the age of 18, the situation had reached a critical point. There were **no more options left.** Emma underwent emergency surgery to remove her large bowel and form an ileostomy - a procedure that would ultimately save her life.

"It was a life or death situation – my stoma surgery saved my life."

The days immediately after surgery were some of the hardest she had ever faced. Painful, overwhelming, and uncertain. But slowly, something began to shift.

CONTINUE EMMA'S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE.

EMMA

CONTINUED....

As the days passed, Emma began to regain strength - physically and emotionally. **Small improvements turned into meaningful progress.** For the first time in years, there was a glimpse of hope.

"As the days went by, I found a little bit more strength every day... I could slowly see the light returning."

Her stoma didn't just change her body - it gave her a second chance at life. Emma's story didn't suddenly become easy. Since her initial surgery, she has faced further complications, including bowel perforations, obstructions, and nine additional surgeries. Today, she lives with **small bowel dysmotility** and **intestinal failure.** Since 2022, she has relied on artificial nutrition - first through intravenous feeding, and now through a feeding tube directly into her jejunum (small bowel). **Despite everything, her perspective remains grounded in gratitude**.

"It's not always easy, but I'm grateful. My stoma and tubes allow me to live and love life again."

For many people especially young people - living with a stoma is something hidden. It can be made invisible. Emma chose a different path. **She began sharing her journey openly on Instagram, documenting not just the highlights, but the raw, unfiltered reality - the good, the bad, and the messy.** Before her surgery, she had searched desperately for others like her. **Seeing people living full lives with a stoma gave her comfort and hope.** Now, she's become that source of comfort for others.

" I want to be that helping hand for others... I want people to feel seen, heard, and less alone."

What once felt isolating has now become a powerful connection point. Through her platform, Emma has built a community of thousands - people who relate, support, and uplift one another. Emma's courage and openness haven't gone unnoticed. She was **awarded a BBC Make a Difference Award in the bravery category by BBC** - a moment that recognised not just her resilience, but the impact of her voice. That recognition led to an unforgettable experience: an invitation to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. **"This is a memory I will treasure for the rest of my life."** From hospital beds to royal grounds - **Emma's journey is nothing short of extraordinary. Through everything she has endured, Emma's message is simple - but powerful:**

"Always hold onto hope. Better days will come, and you will find that light again - one day, one step at a time ."

Her story is a reminder that even in the darkest moments, there is still a path forward. And sometimes, **the very thing that feels like the end - becomes the beginning of a new life.**

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

A dual diagnosis of Crohn's and Colitis changed everything. After years of decline, multiple surgeries, and 109 days in hospital, Ted's story is one of raw survival, loss, and relentless endurance - unfiltered and unapologetically real.

"I could only watch from my hospital bed as my life crumbled."

"Having your insides removed is life changing."

TEDDY

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

TED'S HIGHWAY THROUGH HELL
STORY OF SURVIVAL, LOSS AND ENDURANCE

There are some diagnoses that arrive quietly and then there are the ones that tear through your life, dismantling everything you thought you knew about your body, your future, and your strength.

For Ted, it started in 2010 - with questions no one could answer. For an entire year, his body was in crisis while the system struggled to catch up.

Endless trips to the toilet. Blood. Sickness. Exhaustion. The kind of daily suffering that chips away at you, piece by piece. Then came the diagnosis: **Ulcerative Colitis.** But that wasn't the full story.

"I was so upset… the constant going to the toilet, blood in my stools, sickness and no health."

As Ted's condition worsened, his weight plummeted - from 98kg down to just 53kg. His body was breaking down, and still, nothing was working. No medication.
No hospital stays. No relief.

Eventually, doctors uncovered a devastating truth: he wasn't just fighting one disease. He was fighting two. Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease - two of the most aggressive forms of inflammatory bowel disease - attacking different parts of his bowel at the same time.

"The hospital discovered I was actually fighting in two parts of my bowel - UC and Crohn's disease."

Years passed in a cycle of hospital admissions, treatments, and setbacks. Then, in 2018, everything changed. After a gruelling 12-week hospital stay, the decision was made: Ted's large bowel had to be removed. He would wake up with an ileostomy.

"No one can prepare you for this. The pain physically it brings. Having your insides removed is life changing."

Surgery is often framed as the turning point - the moment things "get better." But for many in the ostomy community, it's not that simple.

For Ted, it was the beginning of a new chapter defined not by recovery, but by endurance. More operations followed. More pieces of his body taken in the fight to keep him alive and then came 2024. A year that would test even the strongest.

CONTINUE TED'S STORY
ON THE NEXT PAGE.

TED'S STORY CONTINUED...

109 Days

That's how long Ted spent in hospital in a single year. 109 days of machines, pain, uncertainty - and watching life continue without him.

"I missed AC/DC and Liam Gallagher gigs. I could only watch from my hospital bed as my life crumbled."

While the world outside moved to the sound of music, Ted was living in silence - confined to a hospital bed, recovering from a full colectomy and 'Barbie butt' surgery, a permanent and life-altering procedure.

These are the moments people don't always talk about. The grief. The anger. The sense of time slipping through your fingers.

In a world that often demands positivity, Ted's honesty cuts through. Not every story is wrapped in optimism. Not every survivor feels strong every day. And that doesn't make their story any less powerful. Because survival isn't always about thriving. Sometimes, it's simply about continuing.

Inflammatory bowel diseases like Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's are often misunderstood. Invisible to the outside world, but relentless on the inside. Ted describes it as something far more serious than people realise. **"I know UC and Crohn's disease is the cousin of cancer and mustn't ever be taken lightly."**

It's a statement that reflects the severity, the fear, and the lived experience of someone who has endured years of relentless illness.

Because for Ted, **this hasn't just been a condition. It's been a war.** After everything - the surgeries, the hospital stays, the missed moments - what's left? Perspective. Even in the darkness, there's a lesson carved out of survival. **"It has taught me that life is so, so very precious and making each day count is paramount."**

Ted doesn't dress his story up. He doesn't pretend it's been inspiring every step of the way. But he kept going. Even when it felt like hell. **"If you're going through hell, keep going."**

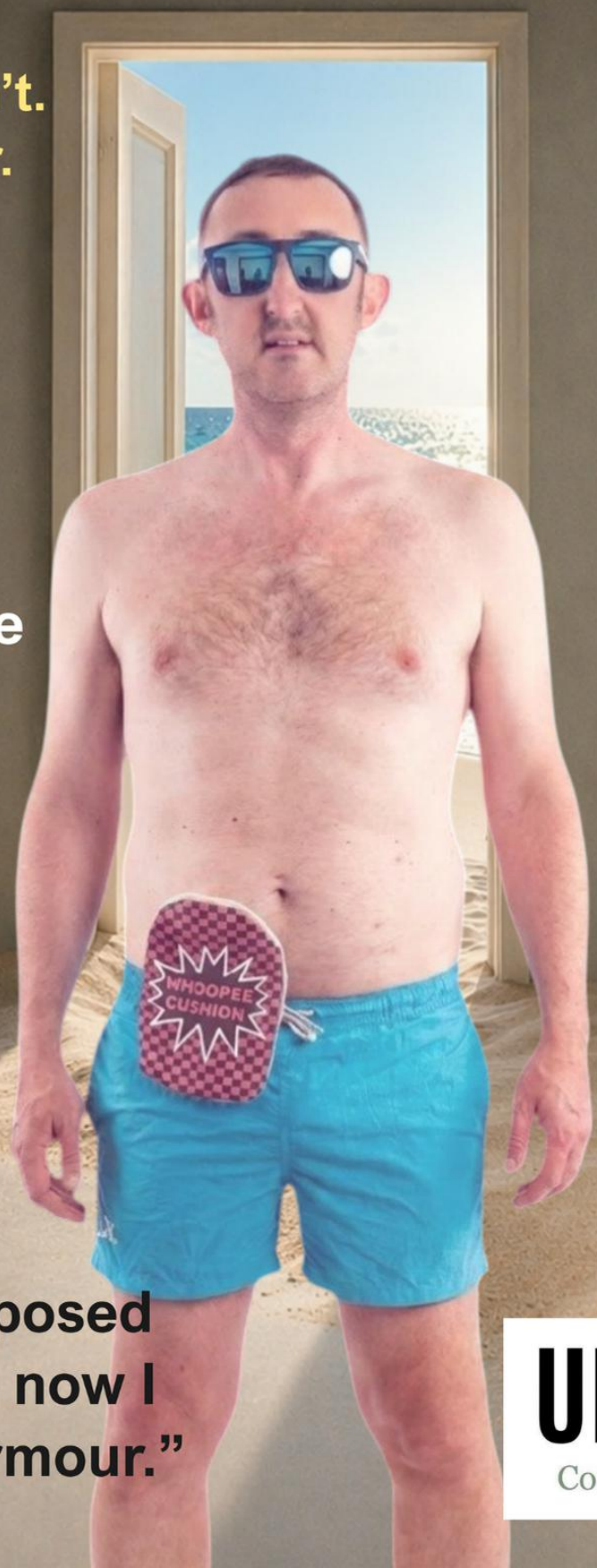
Ted's story isn't about perfection. It's not about being the most positive voice in the room. It's about truth. The kind that sits heavy, but real. Because behind every ostomy, every scar, every surgery - there's a person who didn't choose this life, but is living it anyway. And **sometimes, the greatest victory isn't overcoming. It's enduring.**

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

They told Phill it was probably nothing. It wasn't. A 4.2cm tumour. Stage 3 Bowel Cancer. A life changed forever.



"I'm still here that's what matters."

"I wasn't supposed to have a bag now I wear it like armour."

PHILL

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

PHILL WATTS

"I remember exactly how this story begins - not with drama, not with panic, but with something small. Easy to ignore. Easy to dismiss. A change in routine. A bit of blood. A quiet voice saying, it's probably nothing."

Phill Watts was 43. Married. Three kids - 14, 8 and 6. A normal life, the kind you don't expect to be interrupted. For six months, that's exactly what happened. It was written off as haemorrhoids. It got worse.

Then came the number that changed everything: 718. His FIT test score**.** Followed by a colonoscopy. Followed by the truth. **A 4.2cm tumour. Stage 3 bowel cancer.** And yet, when I ask him about that moment, he doesn't describe fear first.

"I just decided straight away - I was going to deal with it. No drama. No self-pity. Just get on with it."

When your body turns on you, control becomes everything. Phill built his own version of it - **a chemo bingo card.** Not as a joke, but as a way to cope. To track what was happening. To stay one step ahead, even when he wasn't. **"If I could tick it off, I could handle it."**

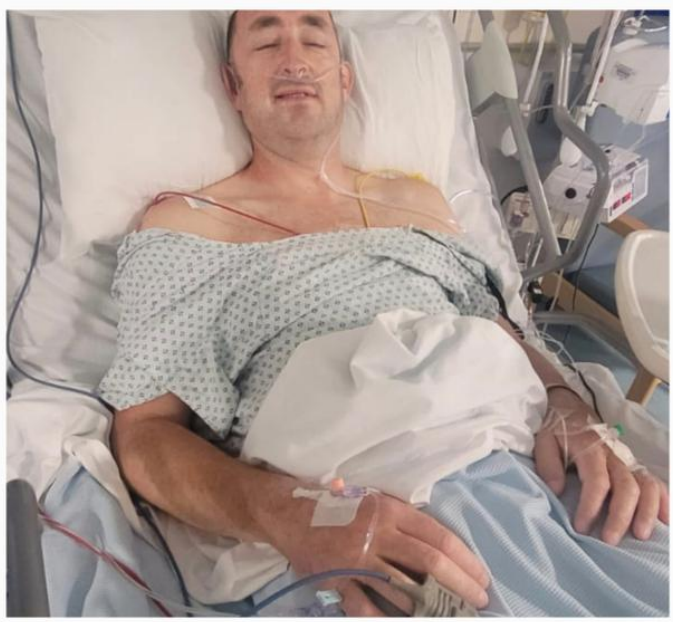
FOLFOXIRI chemotherapy hit hard. Neuropathy. Fatigue. A blood clot. A PICC line infection. And then - another blow. The chemo wasn't working. The tumour hadn't shrunk. **"That was tough. You're doing all this… and it's not doing what it's meant to."**

Next came radiotherapy. Twenty-five sessions. Low-dose chemo alongside it. This time, progress. The tumour shrank. But not enough. A stoma was no longer avoidable. And still - humour found its way in. **"I used to joke with the radiotherapy team that I was turning into The Hulk."**

Not denial. Not avoidance. Just survival, on his own terms.

The surgery lasted seven and a half hours. Tumour removed. Colostomy formed. Life, permanently altered. Recovery wasn't a montage. It was slow. Frustrating. Painful. There was a moment - the moment where everything cracked. **"That was my lowest point. The NG tube, not being able to move properly… that's when I broke."**

Six weeks before he could sit comfortably. **A body that didn't feel like his own.** And something many don't talk about enough - body image. **"You look at yourself differently. That takes time."**



CONTINUE PHILL'S STORY ON THE NEXT PAGE.

PHILL WATTS CONTINUED

This isn't a story of doing it alone. It's a story of support - real, practical, emotional. His wife. His kids. His people. They found ways to make the unbearable, bearable.

"We used things like 'worry monsters' with the kids - so they had somewhere to put their fears."

WE ARE STRONGER THAN WE THINK

His workplace adapted too, creating a work-from-home role so he could keep going without breaking himself further.
And before all of this?

He ran a half marathon. That mattered more than he realised. He said **"Being fit beforehand - it definitely helped me get through it."**

" We are stronger than we think we are - cancer may hold the cards, but you decide how to play the hand."

Post-operative chemo finished on New Year's Eve 2024. Now? Year two of five. Monitoring. Waiting. Living. No evidence of disease.

"I'm still here. That's what matters."

This isn't just about cancer, or surgery, or even a stoma. It's about mindset. Not the toxic kind. Not forced positivity. But the kind that says: this is happening - now what am I going to do about it?

"You've got to find something - even if it's dark humour - to get you through."

And that's the truth most people don't expect: Strength doesn't always look loud.

"Sometimes it looks like ticking off a box on a chemo bingo card. Sometimes it looks like making your kids laugh when you're terrified. Sometimes it looks like getting out of bed when you don't recognise your own body. "

Phill wasn't supposed to have a stoma. Most people aren't. But here he is - still standing, still showing up, still living. And maybe that's the real shift we need to see: Not why me? But what now? **"It doesn't define me. It's just part of the story."**

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

MITCH

WHEN STRENGTH IS REDEFINED

A body pushed to its limits - Ulcerative Colitis, emergency surgery, and the fight to rebuild life, identity, and fatherhood.

“I couldn’t hold and care for my boys.”

“I struggled to accept this was the new me.”

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

WHEN STRENGTH IS REDEFINED

A man whose body was pushed to its limits — navigating ulcerative colitis, emergency surgery, and the reality of rebuilding life, identity, and fatherhood.

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

Mitch Burke's story isn't just about illness - it's about identity, resilience, and what happens when your body forces you to rebuild everything you thought you knew about yourself. Diagnosed with **Ulcerative Colitis** in 2017, Mitch initially managed his condition with something as simple as oral medication. For four years, life remained relatively stable - controlled, predictable, and still recognisably his. **But year five changed everything.** Flare-ups became more aggressive, more frequent, and far harder to control. Treatment escalated quickly - from enemas to hospital admissions, steroid drips, and eventually infliximab. It didn't work. **"I failed response and had some side effects."**

He was then moved onto vedolizumab - **all while his partner was pregnant with their first son**. Despite intense side effects, this treatment finally brought some stability. For a while.

Fast forward to March 2025, and things began to unravel again. Mitch's body stopped responding to vedolizumab, although it wasn't immediately recognised. **He continued through multiple infusions before his condition worsened** to the point of hospitalisation. In early June, Mitch found himself back in hospital - spending his 37th birthday on steroid drips. **"I spent my 37th birthday hooked up to steroids."**

After two weeks, he was discharged. But something didn't feel right - and he trusted that instinct. Just weeks later, another severe flare sent him back to A&E. This time, even steroids weren't enough. Tests revealed the reality - **his large intestine was dangerously close to perforating**. The decision was no longer optional. **"The news was delivered that I would need this life changing surgery."**

What followed should have been recovery - but the journey didn't get easier. On the day he was due to be discharged, Mitch picked up an infection. **Instead of going home, he faced another four weeks in hospital.** When he finally left, the physical healing was only part of it. Emotionally, everything shifted.

At the same time, his second child had just been born - a moment that should have been filled with happiness, but instead collided with **one of the darkest periods of his life.** The impact went deeper than recovery. It was about identity. Confidence. Control. Mitch had always taken pride in his appearance - and suddenly, he didn't recognise his own body. **"I hated my body and the way the stoma made me feel."**

Support became essential. Mitch was referred to counselling, beginning the slow process of rebuilding - mentally as much as physically. Today, **his journey is still ongoing.** The disease remains aggressive. More surgery lies ahead, alongside a correction to his stoma due to a large fistula.

This isn't a neatly wrapped recovery story - it's real, raw, and still unfolding. But within that, there is honesty. And there is strength. Mitch's message is simple - but powerful: **"Time is a healer… it really is true." "Don't be afraid to talk and seek as much support as possible." "Life will return to normal - or a new normal."** At **UNPOUCHED**, this is what we show - the reality behind the aesthetic, the truth behind the image. Because strength doesn't always look like confidence. Sometimes, it looks like surviving something you never thought you'd face - and still finding a way forward.

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

Power, Purpose & The Life Beyond Limits Jearlean Taylor redefines bold, visible, unapologetic living - cancer survivor, model, and multi-hyphenate force for resilience.

"I used to ask, why me? Now I say - why not me?"

"When you accept your reality, adapt to your journey, and adjust your attitude - that's when your life truly begins to change."

JEARLEAN

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

POWER, PURPOSE & THE LIFE BEYOND LIMITS

JEARLEAN TAYLOR

From Baltimore to worldwide platforms, Jearlean Taylor is redefining what it means to live boldly, visibly, and without apology. A cancer survivor, fashion model, author, public speaker, entrepreneur, and ostomy advocate, **her story is not just one of survival - it's one of transformation.**

At just three years old, Jearlean was diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma. Life-saving treatment led to permanent changes, including two ostomies. By the age of four, she was cancer-free - but the emotional and personal journey was only beginning. ***"I used to ask, why me? Now I say — why not me?"***

Behind the strength the world sees today were **years of silent battles** - low self-esteem, insecurities, depression, and moments of deep struggle. **But with support, faith, and resilience, Jearlean began to rebuild herself, learning that survival is not just physical - it's mental, emotional, and spiritual.**

That transformation is now rooted in what she calls her 3 A's:

Accept. Adapt. Attitude.

Acceptance of what is. Adapting to what life becomes. And choosing an attitude that pushes you forward, no matter the circumstances. ***"When you accept your reality, adapt to your journey, and adjust your attitude – that's when your life truly begins to change."***

Today, **Jearlean uses her voice to uplift others navigating ostomy life and medical challenges.** Her message is unwavering: your life is not over because life happened. There is still purpose, still beauty, and still power waiting on the other side.

Her influence stretches far beyond advocacy. From fashion features to appearing on billboards in Times Square and Baltimore, Jearlean is breaking barriers and redefining representation.

Follow Jearlean's journey:

Instagram: @msjearleantaylor

Facebook: Jearlean "Jearl" Taylor

Website: www.jearleantaylor.com

Jearlean Taylor isn't just surviving - she's leading, inspiring, and proving that with the right mindset, anything is possible.

Her presence in media, modeling, and public speaking challenges society's perception of beauty and strength.

Her documentary, Pieces of Me, offers an intimate look into her journey, while her advocacy has reached international audiences, including impactful work in South Africa, with her return planned for October 2026.

"Your life is not over because of your circumstances - there is more waiting for you."

More than 55 years as a double ostomate, Jearlean stands as living proof that **resilience is built over time.**

Her ostomies gave her a better quality of life - they did not take it away. **"My ostomies do not run my life - I do." Her story is not about limitations. It's about living fully, unapologetically, and with intention. "We are all different to make a difference."**

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

OSTOMY CONFIDENT

LIVING BOLDLY & BREAKING STIGMAS.

From worst nightmare to unexpected freedom - BeBe's story of strength with an Ileostomy.

BEBE

"I was diagnosed with stage 4 Colon Cancer in September last year."

"I now really love my bag and I am proud to wear it."

UNPOUCHED

Confidence beyond the pouch

By Gemma Louise McNamara for **UNPOUCHED**

BEBE'S STORY

"I woke up with a stoma and my worst nightmare became my reality... then my freedom."

When BeBe was diagnosed with stage 4 Colon Cancer in September last year, her world changed in an instant. But what came next was something she never fully prepared for - not just the illness, but the unexpected transformation of her body and identity.

"I was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer in September last year." Initially, BeBe was told her treatment plan would not involve surgery. That news brought a wave of relief. **"The treatment plan changed shortly after my diagnosis and wasn't going to include surgery… I was so relieved. I wasn't going to have to have the dreaded bag."** But life rarely follows the plan we cling to in moments of fear. In December, everything shifted again. BeBe underwent emergency surgery and woke up with an ileostomy. **"I had emergency surgery in December and woke up with an ileostomy. I was devastated. At the time, it was my worst nightmare."**

The emotional impact was immediate and overwhelming. Like many people adjusting to life with a stoma, BeBe found herself facing not only physical recovery, but fear, uncertainty, and a complete re-learning of daily life. **"I really struggled at first with all aspects of it."** Simple things suddenly felt huge. Confidence disappeared. Leaving the house felt impossible. Even trust in her own body had to be rebuilt. **"I had a couple of blowouts which were awful and I was terrified of leaving the house with my bag."** But support and small innovations began to shift her experience. After speaking with her stoma nurse, BeBe was introduced to a Heylo device - a sensor-based system that connects to an app and alerts users to potential leaks. That one change made a significant difference. **"It has saved me potential embarrassment when I am out and really helped my confidence."**

Slowly, life started to feel manageable again. Then something even more unexpected happened - acceptance. Not just acceptance, but pride. **"I now really love my bag and I am proud to wear it."** Where there was once fear, there is now routine. Where there was once distress, there is understanding. BeBe describes how living with a stoma has become part of her everyday life - not something to hide from, but something integrated into who she is. **"It does get better and dealing with your bag becomes part of your daily routine."**

And in a twist she never expected at the beginning of her journey, BeBe now reflects on the unexpected positives. **"I really love the fact I don't have to deal with the digestive issues anymore."** Even when offered the possibility of reversal, her perspective has changed. **"I am thinking of keeping it even though I would be a candidate for a reversal."**

Her message to others is grounded, honest, and deeply human - not polished optimism, but lived experience. **"I would say to anyone who has just got their bag - it will be okay. Try to embrace it and look at the positives. It has actually given me a sense of freedom I didn't think I would have."**

BeBe's story is not one of instant acceptance. It is one of disruption, fear, adaptation, and eventually, reclamation. A reminder that even in the moments life feels most altered, identity is not lost - it evolves.

UNPOUCHED CARERS

GIVING CARERS THE VOICE THEY DESERVE.

BY A CARER, FOR CARERS

Caring for someone with an ostomy isn't something you're ever fully prepared for. It's not just about the practical side - it's about **learning a new language of support, patience, and quiet strength.** At the beginning, it can feel overwhelming. There are routines to learn, supplies to manage, and moments where you might worry about saying or doing the wrong thing. But over time, you realise something important: **you don't have to be perfect - you just have to be present.**

Start with listening, not fixing. One of the biggest lessons as a carer is understanding that not everything needs a solution. **Some days, the person you care for doesn't need advice - they just need to feel heard.** Living with an ostomy can bring up body image struggles, fatigue, and frustration. Let them speak openly, without trying to immediately **"make it better."** Learn the practicals - but go at their pace Yes, there's a practical side: changing bags, understanding products, dealing with leaks or skin irritation. But this is their body. **Offer help, don't take over. Confidence grows when independence is respected. Normalise everything!**

The more you treat the ostomy as just another part of life, the easier it becomes for them to do the same. Talk openly. Be calm. Don't react with panic if something goes wrong - even if it feels chaotic in the moment. **Your reaction shapes how they feel.** Protect their confidence. This one matters more than you might think. Compliment them. **Encourage them to wear what they want.** Support their confidence in social situations, intimacy, and everyday life.

An ostomy doesn't take away who they are - and as a carer, you play a huge role in reinforcing that. Take care of yourself too.

Founder:Gemma Louise McNamara & Carer: Scott Knighton

Support in the UK

You're not alone - there is real support available for carers of people with an ostomy:

- **Colostomy UK** - Offers practical guides, a helpline, and support specifically for people with stomas and their carers.
- **Website:** colostomyuk.org
- **Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association (IA)** Provides support groups, resources, and community connections across the UK. Website: ia-support.org
- **NHS** - Your local stoma nurse is one of the best sources of hands-on support, advice, and reassurance for both patients and carers.
- **Carers UK** - A wider support network for carers, offering advice on mental health, finances, and your rights as a carer. Website: carersuk.org

Caring for someone else can be emotionally draining, especially when you're trying to be strong all the time. It's okay to feel tired. It's okay to need space**. You can't pour from an empty cup - and being a good carer includes looking after your own wellbeing.**

Being a carer isn't about having all the answers. **It's about showing up — on the good days, the difficult days, and the completely unpredictable ones.** And sometimes, the most powerful thing you can say is simply:

"I've got you."

By Scott Knighton for **UNPOUCHED**

UNPOUCHED KIDS

NEXT GEN VOICES

A MINI MAG FOR KIDS COMING SOON!

HEY YOU YES YOU

YOU ARE NOT WEIRD

You're not "different" in a bad way.
You're not someone who needs to hide.
Your body just works a little differently - and that's okay.

YOU ARE STILL YOU

YOU CAN STILL:

- Laugh Really Loud
- Wear Your Favourite Clothes
- Make Friends
- Dream Big Dreams

Nothing about you has taken that away.

SOMETIMES IT FEELS HARD

And yeah... some days might feel confusing or even a bit lonley.
That doesn't mean something is wrong with you.
It just means you're human.

THIS SPACE IS FOR YOU

A place where:

- You don't have to explain everything
- You don't have to to feel shy
- You can just be yourself

YOU ARE BRAVE

Even on the days you don't feel like it.

AND YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

Not here.
Not anymore.

FEATURE YOUR CHILD'S VOICE

In our upcoming issues, we are opening space for children's voices. If you would like to be considered for future features, please get in touch.

BE SEEN. BE PROUD. BE UNPOUCHED.

YOUR STORY **MATTERS.**
YOUR VOICE MATTERS.
YOU MATTER.

MIND & WELLBEING

A CALM SPACE FOR REFLECTION, GROUNDING AND HONESTY

Inhale 4 • Hold 4 • Exhale 6 •

Repeat slowly until you feel grounded.

TAKE THIS MOMENT

This space is here to feel **safe**, not overwhelming.

You don't have to be anything here except human.

You are not behind. You are not failing.
You are simply human.

Healing does not ask for perfection —
only presence.

UK SUPPORT

If you need support, you are not alone:

Samaritans

📞 Call: 116 123 (free, 24/7) ✉️ Email: jo@samaritans.org 🌐 Website: samaritans.org
Available 24 hours a day for anyone who needs someone to talk to. You don't have to be in crisis.

Shout Text Line

📱 Text: SHOUT to 85258 (UK) 💬 24/7 text support with trained volunteers 🌐 giveusshout.org

NHS Mental Health

📞 Call: 111 (select mental health option where available) 🌐 https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health
Access to local NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT) services can crisis teams if needed

🧠 If you are in crisis or immediate danger

📞 Call 999 (UK emergency services) Or go to your nearest A&E (Accident & Emergency)

IMPORTANT

Unpouched is based in the UK and can only advise on UK support services. If you are outside the UK, please seek local mental health services in your country.

If you are in immediate danger, contact, contact emergency services.

You are allowed to pause. You are allowed to rest. You are allowed to exist without explanation.

A Space For Empowerment, confidence and care

OSTOMY TIPS

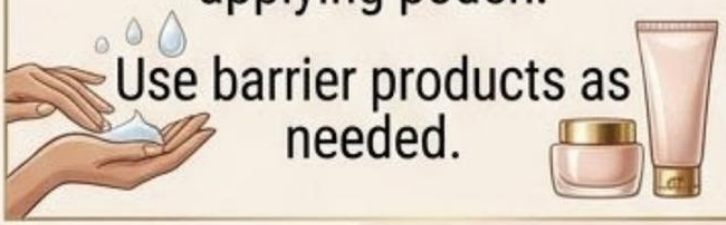
EMBRACE YOUR JOURNEY WITH GENTLE, PRACTICAL ADVICE.

Skin Care & Routine

Cleanse gently with water, avoid harsh soaps.

Ensure skin is dry before applying pouch.

Use barrier products as needed.



Hydration & Diet.

Drink plenty of fluids daily.

Introduce new foods slowly to monitor digestion.

Chew food thoroughly.

Clothing & Comfort

Wear loose-fitting clothes for ease.

Consider support belts or wraps for security.

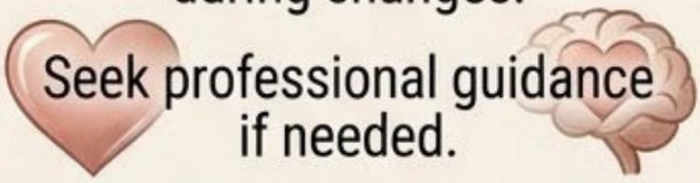
Explore adaptive fashion options.

Mental & Emotional Well-being

Connect with support groups.

Be patient with yourself during changes.

Seek professional guidance if needed.



Send in your tips & advice for a chance to be featured in our upcoming issues.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Our first two issues will always be free in digital form. If you enjoyed them, support what comes next - future issues from £2.49 - £3.99.

ISSUE 02 • SUMMER

This summer issue blends fashion with fitness culture, showing how style adapts when comfort, body confidence, and function all matter.

Alongside real stories from people living with an ostomy, Issue 02 highlights how identity doesn't pause in summer, it evolves.

Expect honest conversations, practical lifestyle insight, and a fresh take on dressing for heat, activity, and self-expression.

Stay confident.
Stay active.
Stay you.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO SIGN THE PETITION: WWW.UNPOUCHED.CO.UK

ADVERTISE WITH UNPOUCHED

REACH A COMMUNITY THAT ISN'T BEING SPOKEN TO – BUT SHOULD BE.

> We don't sell advertising in the traditional sense. We offer editorial integration within a platform built on trust, identity, and lived experience."

UNPOUCHED is a fashion and lifestyle magazine and movement built for people living with an ostomy and created by someone who lives it.
This is not a generic audience. This is a real, engaged, and often overlooked community.

WE DON'T OFFER EMPTY VISIBILITY.
We offer connection, trust, and representation.

WE DO NOT SELL ADVERTISING SPACE.
We curate editorial presence within a lived experience platform.

COLLABORATE WITH US

GET IN TOUCH TODAY

hello@unpouched.co.uk

Whether you're a stoma care provider supplying bags and accessories, a clothing brand designing adaptive wear, or a creator making pouch covers and everyday essentials - if your work supports the ostomy community, we want to help you be seen. At **UNPOUCHED**, we connect meaningful brands with real people, building visibility where it actually matters.

MY INSPIRATION

Meet Annie, who will be featured in our Summer Issue. This incredible woman has beenmy inspiration for over a decade.

The strength she's shown in her journey has given me the courage to fight, to keep going, and to be seen for who i am.

We conntected through CCUK support groups when i was first diagnosed, and that moment changed everything/

I can't wait to share her story with you all.

MY SUPPORT

CCUK has been my lifeline from day one.

Iv'e met thousands of incredible people through this amazing comunnity.

I've fundraised in the past and can't wait to get involved again in the future.

If you're thinking about getting involved - do it. It truly is one of the best decisions i've ever made.

I made a family here - one that understands, one that helps, and for that i'm truly blessed and grateful.

CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

UNPOUCHED

confidence beyond the pouch

THANK YOU

FOR READING UNPOUCHED.

We hope you've enjoyed this issue
and will continue to support the voices,
stories, and conversations
shaping the future of our community.

> THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING —
> AND WE'RE GRATEFUL TO HAVE YOU
> WITH US FOR EVERY ISSUE TO COME.

CONTACT US

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