A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT
THE OSTOMY CUBE

YOUNG VOICES
YOUNG AND UNPOUCHED

REAL STORIES
LIVING WITH A STOMA

SUMMER TIPS
FASHION, FITNESS & WELLBEING

STRONGER TOGETHER

SUPPORT THAT UNDERSTANDS

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

SUMMER 2026
ISSUE02

“CONFIDENCE ISN’T ABOUT HIDING YOUR STOMA. IT’S ABOUT REFUSING TO HIDE YOURSELF.”

“THIS SUMMER, WEAR THE SWIMSUIT. TAKE THE PHOTO. LIVE THE LIFE.”

DO SOMETHING TODAY THAT YOUR FUTURE SELF WILL THANK YOU FOR....

OUR ACTIONS AND DECISIONS TODAY WILL SHAPE THE WAY WE WILL BE LIVING IN THE FUTURE.....

CONTENTS

EDITORS LETTER

Summer has a way of making us feel seen. As the weather gets warmer and the layers come off, living with a stoma can suddenly feel more visible. Swimwear, holidays, body confidence, heat, sweating around baseplates, worrying about leaks, wondering what to wear - these are conversations so many of us quietly have with ourselves every year.

That's exactly why I wanted this issue of **UNPOUCHED** to focus on fashion, lifestyle, confidence, and real summer living with a stoma. Because having a stoma should never mean sitting life out.

Inside this edition, you'll find summer style inspiration, tips for staying cool and comfortable in the heat, hydration and food advice, honest conversations around confidence, and stories from people across our community who are learning to live fully and unapologetically in their own bodies from all over the world.

This issue means so much to me because we're continuing to expand the voices featured in UNPOUCHED. Alongside nine incredible real-life ostomate stories - including two inspiring young voices - we're excited to reveal an innovative new business and celebrate StoCare as the brand marks its 10th anniversary since launching. It's a privilege to share the stories, innovations, and people helping to shape the future of the ostomy community, and I hope these pages leave you feeling informed, inspired, and connected.

What I love most about this edition is that it doesn't focus on simply "coping." It focuses on living. Living fully. Living confidently. Living on your own terms. Whether this is your first summer with a stoma or your tenth, **I hope these pages remind you that confidence is built one step at a time.** Sometimes it's saying yes to the trip, wearing the swimsuit, taking the photo, or trying something you've been avoiding. **Whatever confidence looks like for you, I hope this issue inspires you to embrace new experiences and make the most of every moment.**

Thank you for continuing to support **UNPOUCHED** and helping grow a space where ostomates can feel represented not just medically, but socially, emotionally, and creatively too. This community deserves visibility. It deserves honesty. And it deserves style. Welcome to the Summer Edition.

Gemma Louise McNamara
Founder of **UNPOUCHED**

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR FUTURE ISSUES:

We're proud to keep Issue 01, 02 and 03 FREE digitally forever. As **UNPOUCHED** continues to grow, future digital issues including our young voices own magazine will be priced between £2.49-£4.99 per issue to help support the continued development and production of the magazine and future representation goals - with printed copies planned for the near future as well as merch coming soon!

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

THE OSTOMY CUBE

ONE WOMAN'S MISSION TO BRING INDEPENDENCE BACK TO OSTOMY CARE..

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

INNOVATED BY A STOMA WARRIOR

THE OSTOMY CUBE

ONE WOMAN'S MISSION TO BRING INDEPENDENCE BACK TO OSTOMY CARE

"I HATED THAT EXPERIENCE."

They are just four simple words, but they carry the weight of a journey that so many ostomates will immediately understand. For Carolyn, founder of Ostomy Cube, the inspiration behind **her ground breaking innovation wasn't born in a boardroom - it came from living the reality of life with an ostomy.**

After spending **13 years battling slow bowel transit** and relying on increasingly strong laxatives, surgery finally gave Carolyn her life back. But like so many of us, she quickly realised that an ostomy brings its own challenges. Then came another life-changing moment. **During pregnancy, Carolyn developed severe carpal tunnel syndrome** in both hands, leaving her unable to manage her own ostomy care.

"By the end of my pregnancy my partner Stephen had to take over my ostomy care. There's no shame between us... but I HATED that experience."

Although she regained her independence after giving birth, the feeling never left her. Instead, it became a question. What if there was a better way?

Sometimes the biggest ideas begin with the simplest conversations. Carolyn recalls how her partner Stephen gently asked one question that would change both of their lives. "What would you have needed to stay independent?"

That conversation snowballed into six years of research, design, testing and determination. Today, that idea has become **The Ostomy Cube** an innovative toilet facility designed specifically for people living with an ostomy. Compact enough to fit into existing bathrooms, whether at home, in workplaces or public accessible toilets, **The Ostomy Cube has been created to make ostomy care easier, cleaner and, most importantly, more dignified.**

BORN TO STAND OUT

One thing that immediately stood out to us at **UNPOUCHED** was that **this wasn't a product designed around assumptions.** Carolyn didn't simply rely on her own experiences. **She spent years interviewing hundreds of ostomates, stoma care nurses, carers, infection prevention specialists and healthcare professionals to understand what people genuinely needed.**

"The Ostomy Cube is not a product designed around my own needs alone. It has been shaped by years of research, customer discovery and collaboration with the ostomy community."

That commitment is reflected in every detail.

DESIGNED BY AN OSTOMATE... FOR OSTOMATES

CUSTOM BAG COVER BY STOMASTYLES

CONTINUE READING ON THE NEXT PAGE

THE OSTOMY CUBE

CONTINUED

Unlike a standard toilet, **The Ostomy Cube** has been designed specifically around the everyday realities of ostomy life. Features include an integrated rinse tap, handheld stoma shower, adjustable mirror, storage shelf, a measuring system for output, and a height that allows users to empty their pouch comfortably without awkward bending or kneeling.

Inspired by the World... Improved for Everyone.
Carolyn researched ostomy facilities across the globe, particularly in Japan and Spain. While impressed by what already existed, she recognised there was still room for improvement.

The result is something far more practical for everyday life. Instead of requiring major building work or large clinical spaces, **The Ostomy Cube has been designed to fit into existing bathrooms** quickly and affordably -opening the possibility for installation in homes, hospitals, schools, airports, workplaces, train stations and public toilets.

"I took the best elements from both approaches and went back to the drawing board."

"The Ostomy Cube was designed to maximise a person's ability to care for themselves."

Reading Carolyn's story, one message came through louder than any technical feature. This isn't simply about plumbing. It's about dignity. It's about privacy. It's about giving people back something illness can quietly take away.

"At its heart, the Cube is about preserving dignity, building confidence and giving ostomates greater control over their own care and daily lives."

For many readers of **UNPOUCHED**, those words will resonate deeply. Whether you're newly formed or decades into life with an ostomy, independence is something none of us take for granted. Innovation rarely happens overnight. Bringing The Ostomy Cube to life has taken six years of persistence through technical challenges, funding hurdles and product development. Carolyn is quick to acknowledge one person who has stood beside her throughout.

"My wonderful partner Stephen has been by my side every step of the way."

In fact, **it was Stephen who built the very first prototype four years ago,** transforming Carolyn's vision into something tangible. **Sometimes behind every great innovation is simply a family refusing to give up.**

Looking ahead. The first installations of **The Ostomy Cube are expected to begin this September across Ireland and the UK,** with a second batch of pre-orders opening shortly afterwards. **Carolyn's vision goes far beyond launching a successful product.** She wants to see ostomy-friendly facilities become a recognised part of accessibility standards, ensuring people with an ostomy can travel, work and live with greater confidence.

"Ultimately, my goal is for ostomates everywhere to have access to safe, hygienic and dignified facilities, with ostomy inclusion recognised as a standard part of accessibility design."

Here at **UNPOUCHED**, we know that true innovation often comes from lived experience. **Carolyn didn't set out simply to invent a product - she set out to solve a problem that thousands of ostomates face every single day.**

The Ostomy Cube represents more than clever engineering. It represents hope, independence and the belief that accessibility should include everyone living with an ostomy. As Carolyn so perfectly puts it:

"With the ostomy community's support, we can develop and roll out the Ostomy Cube to improve accessibility and quality of life for ostomates worldwide."

If **The Ostomy Cube** achieves its vision, the next generation of ostomates may one day wonder how we ever managed without it.

Written By: Gemma Louise McNamara

CHECK OUT THEIR WEBSITE

www.ostomycube.ie

SUMMER STYLE TIPS FOR WOMEN

THE SUMMER EDIT

SHOW YOUR EDGY SIDE WITH BOLD FASHION

Summer is the perfect time to express your style, feel confident and embrace every part of who you are.

YOUR OSTOMY DOESN'T DEFINE YOU. YOUR STYLE DOES.

With the right fabrics, flattering fits and confidence-boosting colours, you can create effortless summer looks that can make you feel amazing - wherever the season takes you.

SUMMER OUTFIT IDEAS

THE RESORT LOOK

Flowy linen shirt, crop top and wide-leg trousers. Effortless, breathable and chic.

THE CASUAL COOL

High-waisted denim shorts, fitted tank and lightweight overshirt. Perfect everyday style.

THE BEACH VIBES

Supportive swimsuit, sarong and oversized sunglasses. Pool or beach ready!

THE EVENIG EDGE

Statement top, wide-leg trousers and bold accessories. Dress it up and own the night.

THE BOHO BEAUTY

Maxi dress, denim jacket and layered jewellery. Comfort meets Bohemian style.

"Your pouch is part of your journey, never a limit to your adventure. Confidence is the best thing you'll wear this summer."

COLOUR IDEAS FOR SUMMER

- **NEUTRALS** For a timeless base.
- **OLIVE & KHAKI** For a natural edge.
- **CORAL & PEACH** For a pop of energy.
- **BLUE & TURQUOISE** For cool, calm vibes.
- **MUSTARD & TERRACOTTA** For warm, bold tones.

STYLE CONFIDENCE CHECKLIST

- WEAR WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL AMAZING
- CHOOSE OUTFITS THAT FIT YOUR BODY AND LIFESTYLE.
- DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRY BOLD COLOURS.
- ACCESSORIES CAN ELEVATE ANY OUTFIT.
- MOST IMPORTANTLY, OWN YOUR CONFIDENCE AND ENJOY SUMMER!

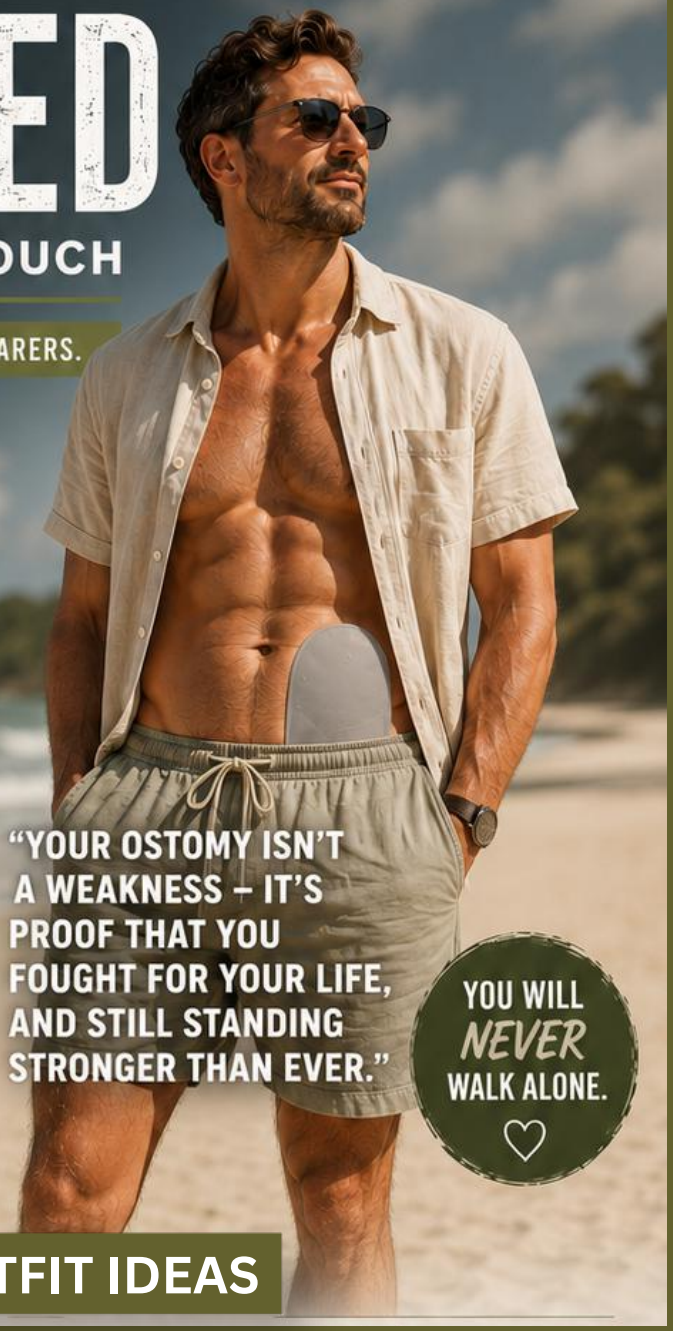
YOUR OSTOMY IS PART OF YOUR STORY, NOT THE FOCUS OF IT.
STYLE IS ABOUT EXPRESSING YOU - BOLD, BEAUTIFUL & UNSTOPPABLE.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

SUMMER STYLE FOR MEN



CONFIDENCE ISN'T COVERED. IT'S OWNED.

Summer is for freedom.
Freedom to enjoy, to explore,
to be active and to feel good
in your own skin.
Your stoma doesn't hold you back.
YOUR MINDSET DOES.

"YOUR OSTOMY ISN'T A WEAKNESS – IT'S PROOF THAT YOU FOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE, AND STILL STANDING STRONGER THAN EVER."

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

SUMMER OUTFIT IDEAS

BEACH READY

Light tee, swim shorts and sunglasses.
Simple, classic and beach ready.

CASUAL DAYS

Breathable polo, chino shorts and loafers.
Clean, easy and effortless.

ACTIVE MODE

Performance tank, flexi shorts and trainers.
Built to move, built for you.

HOLIDAY VIBES

Linen shirt, tailored shorts and a hat.
Relaxed, stylish and stoma-friendly.

EVENING OUT

Short sleeve shirt, smart shorts and loafers.
Confident from day to night.

WEEKEND CHILL

Soft tee, relaxed shorts and sliders.
Easy comfort all weekend long.

FABRICS THAT WORK

COTTON SOFT, BREATHABLE AND GENTLE ON SKIN.

LINEN LIGHTWEIGHT AND PERFECT FOR HOT DAYS.

BAMBOO NATURALLY BREATHABLE & MOISTURE WICKING.

STRETCH MOVES WITH YOU FOR ALL DAY COMFORT.

COLOURS THAT KEEP YOU COOL

WHITE CRISP AND CLEAN

SAND CALM AND NATURAL

BEIGE TIMELESS AND VERSATILE

OLIVE EARTHY AND STRONG.

SEA BLUE FRESH AND LIGHT

SUMMER CONFIDENCE CHECKLIST

UNPOUCHED SAYS

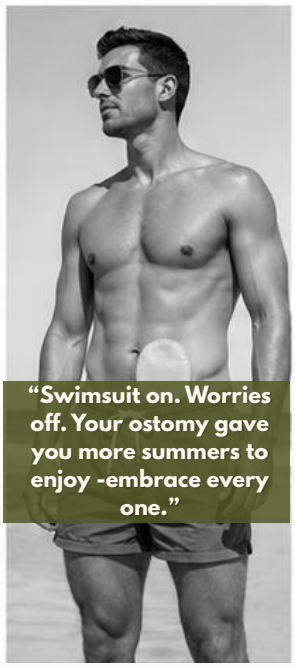
- WEAR WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD.
- STAY HYDRATED AND FUEL YOUR BODY.
- MOVE YOUR BODY. ITS BOOSTS MINDSET.
- DON'T COMPARE. YOUR JOURNEY, YOUR RULES.

BE BOLD. BE YOU. BE UNPOUCHED.

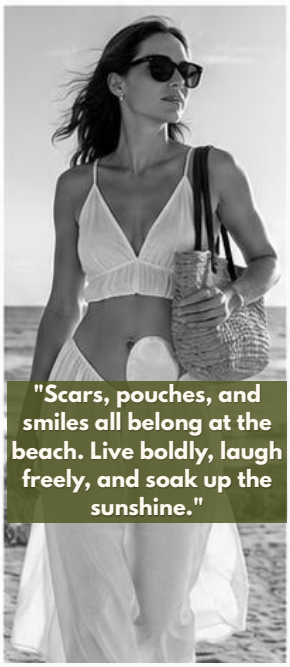
SUMMER ESSENTIALS

MUST HAVES FOR HOT WEATHER

- MINI EMERGENCY CHANGE KIT
- ELECTROLYTE DRINKS
- HYDRATION TABLETS
- ADHESIVE REMOVER WIPES
- BARRIER EXTENDERS
- ANTI-CHAFING SHORTS
- LIGHTWEIGHT WUPPORTWEAR
- COOLING FACIAL SPRAY OR MINI FAN
- LOOSE BREATHABLE CLOTHING



"Swimsuit on. Worries off. Your ostomy gave you more summers to enjoy -embrace every one."



"Scars, pouches, and smiles all belong at the beach. Live boldly, laugh freely, and soak up the sunshine."

"Wear your smile, not your worries. Your ostomy is proof that strength is always in season."

THIS SUMMER WEAR THE OUTFIT

Wear the swimsuit.
Go to the beach.
Take the photo.

Your stoma does not disqualify you from confidence, style or summer memories.

CONFIDENCE IS NOT ABOUT HIDING YOUR BODY. IT'S ABOUT LIVING IN IT. ♥

FESTIVAL Outfits

— FOR OSTOMATES —

FEEL GOOD. LOOK GREAT. LIVE LOUD.

Your ostomy doesn't define you. How you live does.

You deserve to enjoy every moment. Here's your guide to feeling confident, comfortable and festival-ready with a stoma.

STAY COOL

- Choose breathable fabrics like cotton, bamboo & linen.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing to allow air flow.
- Use anti-chafing balm or powder to prevent irritation.
- Take breaks in the shade and listen to your body.

STAY HYDRATED

- Drink water regularly - don't wait until you're thirsty.
- Take electrolyte drinks or tablets to replace lost salts.
- Limit alcohol and balance with water.
- Refill your bottle often - most festivals have water points!

FESTIVAL SURVIVAL KIT

- Spare Supplies
- Disposal bags
- Hand sanitiser
- Wet wipes
- Barrier wipes
- Pain relief
- Mini fan
- Electrolyte sachets

WHAT TO WEAR

CROP TOP & HIGH WAISTED BOTTOMS

High waisted shorts or skirts sit above your stoma and help you feel secure and confident.

CO-ORD SETS OR MATCHING SETS

Co-ords are comfy, stylish and require minimal effort - perfect for festival days!

LOOSE DRESSES & PLAYSUITS

Floaty loose outfits are cool, comfortable and give you freedom to dance all day long.

COMFY TEES & SHORTS FOR MEN

Choose soft, breathable fabrics and relaxed fits. Elastic or drawstring shorts are your best friend.

BOHO & FESTIVAL VIBES

Fringe, crochet & breezy layers are not only on trend, they're stoma-friendly too!

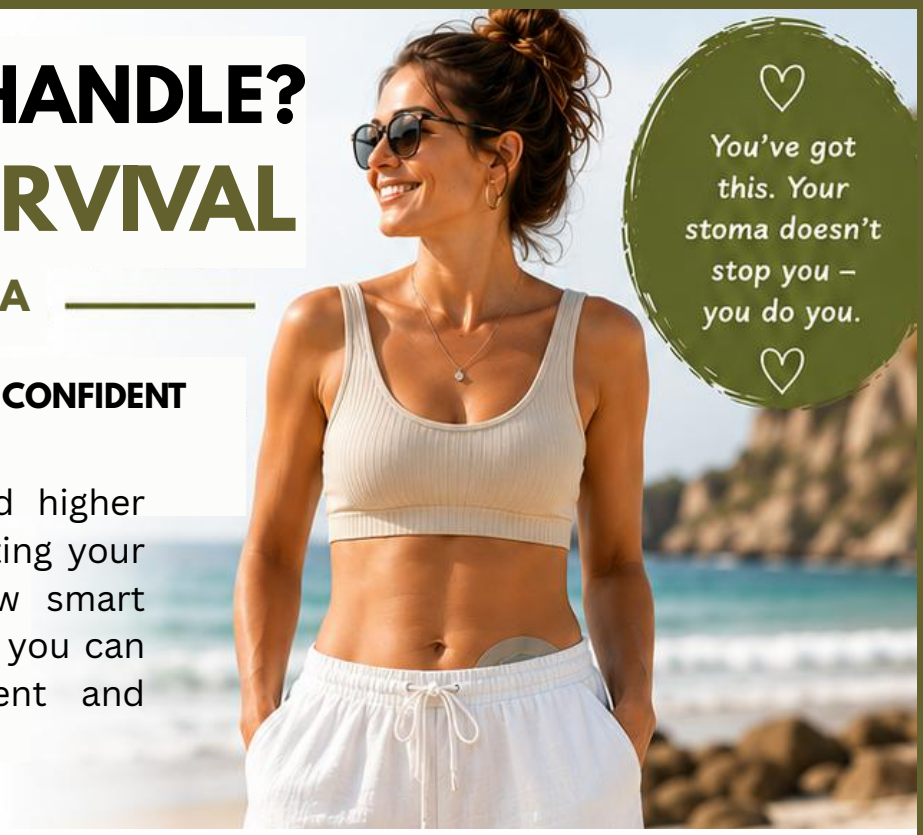
EXTRA TIPS

- Check the facilities ahead of time - plan your loo breaks.
- Change your appliance at quiet times .
- Wear what makes YOU feel amazing. Confidence is your best accessory!
- Dance, sing, laugh and soak up the good vibes - you belong here.

Same you, New adventures. Let's make memories!

YOU DESERVE TO FEEL GREAT, IN AND OUT OF THE WATER.
BE PROUD. BE ACTIVE. BE UNSTOPPABLE.

TOO HOT TO HANDLE?
SUMMER SURVIVAL
WITH A STOMA



STAY COOL, COMFORTABLE & CONFIDENT ALL SUMMER LONG

Hot weather, sunshine and higher temps shouldn't mean putting your life on pause. With a few smart swaps and simple routines, you can stay comfortable, confident and worry-free all summer long.

HEAT TIPS

BREATHABLE FABRICS
Choose natural, breathable materials like cotton or bamboo to help keep cool and reduce sweat build-up.

CHANGE BAGS MORE OFTEN
Heat can affect how adhesives wear. Changing more regularly helps protect your skins and prevents leaks.

BARRIER EXTENDERS
Use barrier extenders or strips or extra security, especially during sweaty days.

SHOWER ROUTINES
A gentle shower can help you feel refreshed and keep your skin clean and cool.

HYDRATION IS KEY
Drink plenty of water throughout the day - it helps your body, your skin and your energy levels.

CLOTHING TIPS

NATURAL FABRICS
Bamboo is soft, breathable and perfect for those really hot days.

ANTI-CHAFING SHORTS
These can prevent rubbing and irritation, especially when you're active.

LOOSE WAISTBANDS
Avoid tight clothing that can rub or tap heat around your stoma.

SUPPORT WRAPS IN THE HEAT
Lightweight wraps can offer support and confidence - look for beathable options.

SWIMWEAR CONFIDENCE
High-waisted swimwear or stoma-friendly swimwear can help you feel secure and stylish.

CONFIDENCE HACKS
You are more than your stoma. Wear what makes you feel good and focus on making memories.

Remember

Plan ahead for days out in the heat

Keep wipes, barrier spray and supplies handy.

Take breaks, find shade and listen to your body.

You deserve to enjoy every sunny moment.

PREPARE SMART. STAY COOL. LIVE BOLD.
YOUR STOMA. YOUR LIFE. YOUR SUMMER.

Summer Food & Hydration ♡

Staying hydrated and making smart food choices can help you feel your best all summer long - whether you're at home, travelling or enjoying the sunshine.

HYDRATION IS KEY

Hydration is key especially with an ileostomy, your body loses more fluids and electrolytes, especially in hot weather. Sip regularly throughout the day - don't wait until you feel thirsty.

HYDRATION WITH AN ILEOSTOMY

- AIM FOR 2-2.5 LITRES OF FLUID DAILY (UNLESS ADVISED OTHERWISE.)
- SIP CONSISTENTLY THROUGHOUT THE DAY.
- INCLUDE ORAL REHYDRATION SOLUTIONS IF OUTPUT IS HIGH.
- WATCH FOR SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION: DARK URINE, FATIGUE, DIZZINESS, DRY MOUTH.

ELECTROLYTES MATTER

- SODIUM, POTASSIUM, MAGNESIUM AND CHLORIDE ARE YOUR BEST FRIENDS.
- USE ELECTROLYTE DRINKS OR ADD A PINCH OF SALT TO MEALS IF NEEDED.
- GREAT OPTIONS: DIORALYTE, HYDRALYTE, LMNT, COCONUT WATER.

SUMMER-SAFE SNACKS

- EASY TO DIGEST AND GENTLE ON OUTPUT.

GREAT OPTIONS:

- BANANA
- RICE CAKES
- MELON
- GREEK YOGHURT
- SMOOTH NUT BUTTERS
- BOILED EGGS

FOODS THAT CAN HELP THICKEN OUTPUT

- WHITE RICE
- PASTA
- BANANAS
- TOAST
- PEANUT BUTTER
- MASH POTATO
- OATS
- BOILED POTATOES

BBQ ANXIETY? YOU'VE GOT THIS!

- EAT A SMALL, SAFE MEAL BEFOREHAND OR BRING SOMETHING YOU KNOW YOU CAN EAT.
- STAY HYDRATED
- DON'T FEEL PRESSURED IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO.

ALCOHOL & DEHYDRATION

- ALCOHOL CAN DEHYDRATE YOU AND INCREASE OUTPUT.
- DRINK SLOWLY AND ALTERNATE WITH WATER.
- CHOOSE LOWER SUGAR OPTIONS: DRY WINE, SPIRITS WITH SODA OR LIGHT BEERS.

TRAVELLING ABROAD

- Pack extra supplies in hand luggage.
- Carry a doctor's letter (translated if needed.)
- Research food and water safety at your destnation.
- Take rehydration sachets and safe sacks with you.
- Know where to find medical help if needed.

Good to Remember ♡

There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to food and hydration with a stoma. Listen to your body, trust your instincts and give yourself grace.

You're doing an amazing job. ♡

MIND & WELLBEING

THE SUMMER EDIT

MORE THAN WHAT YOU SEE

Summer can be a season of sunshine, holidays, lighter clothing and special gatherings. But for many people living with an ostomy, it can also bring feelings of anxiety, self-consciousness and a loss of confidence. As temperatures rise, so can concerns about body image, visibility of an ostomy pouch, swimming, intimacy and the fear of being judged by others. These feelings are incredibly common - but they are often faced in silence.

At UNPOUCHED, we believe it's time to break the stigma surrounding life with an ostomy.

An ostomy doesn't only affect the body. It can impact mental wellbeing, self-esteem, confidence, relationships and the way we see ourselves. Adjusting to life after surgery is a journey, and that journey looks different on everyone.

"YOU ARE NOT ALONE"

Thousands of men and women and children live full, active and fulfilling lives with an ostomy. Every scar tells a story of resilience. Every step taken despite fear is a sign of strength. This season, we're encouraging open conversations, share experiences, and greater understanding. By talking honestly about both the physical and emotional realities of living with an ostomy, we can help others feel seen, be supported and empowered.

THIS SUMMER, LET'S:

- Challenge misconceptions about ostomies
- Support positive body confidence
- Prioritise mental wellbeing as much as physical health
- Celebrate every individual's journey.
- Remind one another that confidence grows through connection

BECAUSE LIVING WITH AN OSTOMY IS ABOUT SO MUCH MORE THAN WHAT'S ON THE OUTSIDE.

It's about strength, courage, adaption and finding confidence in your own skin.

TOGETHER WE CAN BREAK THE STIGMA AND ENSURE NOBODY FACES THEIR JOURNEY ALONE.

BREAKING STIGMA | BUILDING CONFIDENCE | SUPPORTING WELLBEING

FITNESS & STRENGTH

THE SUMMER EDIT

STRONGER THIS SUMMER

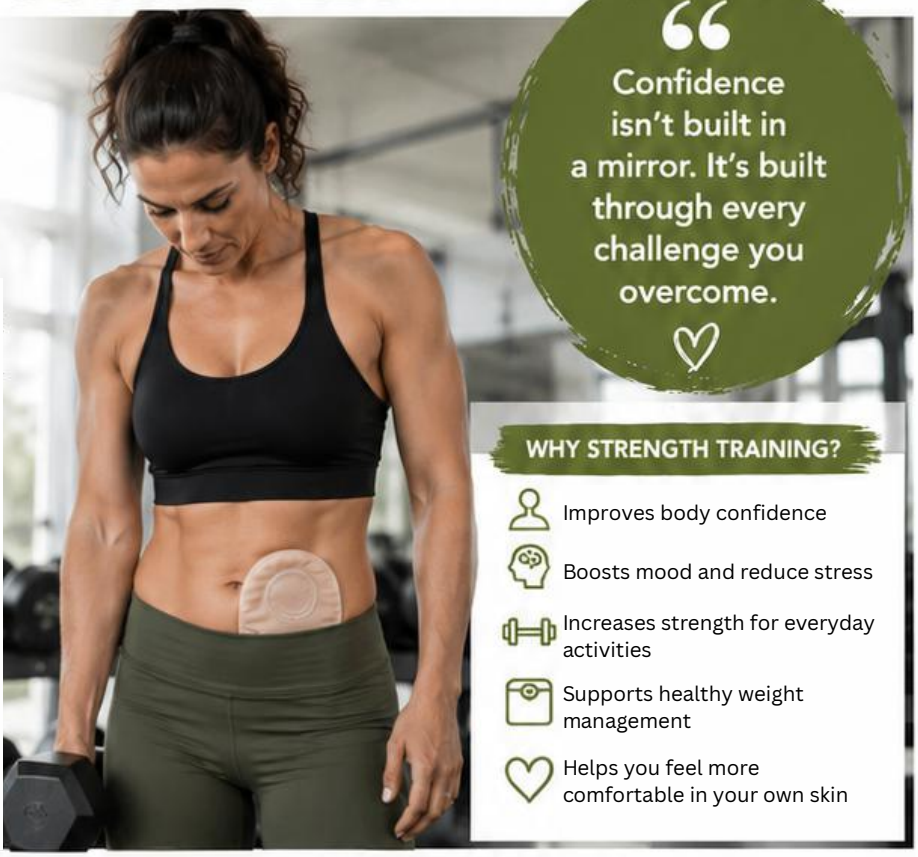
Building confidence, strength and resilience - one workout at a time.

Summer can be a challenging season for many ostomates. Lighter clothing, beach days and social events can sometimes make us more aware of our bodies.

But exercise isn't about changing who you are.

It's about discovering what your body is capable of.

Whether you're new to fitness or returning after surgery, strength training can improve confidence, energy levels, posture, mental wellbeing and overall health.



> Confidence isn't built in a mirror. It's built through every challenge you overcome.

WHY STRENGTH TRAINING?

- Improves body confidence
- Boosts mood and reduce stress
- Increases strength for everyday activities
- Supports healthy weight management
- Helps you feel more comfortable in your own skin

BEGINNER WORKOUT PLAN 3 TIMES PER WEEK

1 BODYWEIGHT SQUATS

10-15 REPS X 3 SETS

BUILD LEG AND GLUTE STRENGTH WHILE IMPROVING MOBILITY.

2 INCLINE PUSH-UPS

8-12 REPS X 3 SETS

USE A BENCH WALL OR STURDY SURFACE IF NEEDED.

3 DUMBBELL SHOULDER PRESS

10-12 REPS X 3 SETS

START LIGHT AND FOCUS ON CONTROLLED MOVEMENT.

4 WALKING LUNGES

10 REPS EACH LEG X 3 SETS

EXCELLENT FOR BALANCE AND LOWER-BODY STRENGTH.

5 RESISTANCE BAND ROWS

12-15 REPS X 3 SETS

STRENGTHENS YOUR BACK AND IMPROVES POSTURE.

6 BRISK WALK

15-20 MINUTES

FINISH EACH WORKOUT WITH LIGHT CARDIO.

OSTOMY FITNESS TIPS

Train smart, not hard.

- Start with lighter weights
- Focus on good technique
- Stay hydrated in warmer weather
- Wear support garments if recommended
- Listen to your body
- Progress gradually
- Consult your stoma nurse or healthcare team before beginning a new programme

SUMMER CONFIDENCE STARTS HERE

You don't need a perfect physique. You don't need sick-pack abs. You don't need to hide your ostomy.

Every workout completed.
Every weight lifted.
Every step Taken.

Is proof that your body is stronger than you think.

YOUR OSTOMY DOESN'T DEFINE YOUR STRENGTH.

Strong. Capable. Unstoppable.

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

DISCIPLINE.
FOCUS.
STRENGTH.
CONSISTENCY.
RESULTS.

"This isn't the end of your story. It's the first page of a brand new chapter."

JAKE'S STORY: LIFE AFTER A STOMA.

From crisis to comeback. How Jake rebuilt his health, his strength and his future.

JAKE

WHEN I FIRST SAW MY STOMA, I DIDN'T FEEL FEAR. I FELT PRIDE.

STARTING AGAIN

HOW FITNESS HELPED JAKE FIGHT FOR HIS LIFE BACK

Powerlifting taught him that progress isn't measured by one perfect lift. It's built through resilience, consistency and the determination to keep going when every part of you wants to stop. But **after years of living with Ulcerative Colitis, he found himself facing a challenge that no amount of training could prepare him for.**

For years, fitness wasn't simply a hobby; it was part of who he was. It gave him structure, purpose and an outlet when life became difficult. So **when his health began to deteriorate, it wasn't just his body that suffered - it was the identity he had built around strength and discipline.**

Today, as he recovers from major surgery and prepares to rebuild from the ground up, **he hopes his story will show others that a stoma doesn't mean the end of an active life. In many ways, it can be the beginning of one.**

"FITNESS BECAME MY WAY OF PROVING THAT ULCERATIVE COLITIS DIDN'T CONTROL MY LIFE."

A word of advice: **The more you move, the better you feel. Exercise releases endorphins, boosts your energy, and improves your mood.** Plus, **staying active helps with stress relief, mental clarity, and long-term health**. So get moving! Whether it's a quick stretch or an intense workout, find what works for you . Your body will thank you.

"I DON'T MEASURE SUCCESS BY NUMBERS IN THE GYM ANYMORE. I MEASURE IT BY GETTING MY LIFE BACK."

Continue on the next page

STARTING AGAIN CONTINUED

"I WASN'T CHASING PERSONAL BESTS ANYMORE. I WAS CHASING A NORMAL DAY."

Jake was diagnosed with **Ulcerative Colitis** in 2018, although looking back, the signs may have been there much earlier. His mother often tells him that he experienced bowel problems as a baby before they disappeared, only to return when he was around 18 years old. **Despite the diagnosis, life remained relatively normal for the next six years**. He continued working, socialising and training, refusing to allow his condition to dictate his future. **Fitness became a huge part of his life, particularly powerlifting**. The gym was more than a place to train - it was somewhere he could challenge himself, build confidence and focus on what his body could achieve rather than what it couldn't. **He was determined that Ulcerative Colitis would never define him.**

Unfortunately, over the last two to three years, that changed. **His symptoms became increasingly severe and his body seemed to fail every treatment that was offered.** He worked his way through biologics and JAK inhibitors, hoping each new medication would finally be the one that worked. None of them gave him the quality of life he was searching for. **The year leading up to surgery became one of the hardest periods of his life.**

He describes it as living a **"stop-start lifestyle."** He couldn't commit to plans because he never knew how he would feel from one day to the next. He missed significant amounts of work and eventually had to take time off sick. At the same time, **his progress in the gym stalled as he battled inflammation, fatigue and relentless flare-ups.**

"IT FELT LIKE TAKING THREE STEPS FORWARD AND TWO STEPS BACK EVERY SINGLE WEEK."

For someone used to measuring progress through discipline and consistency, it was incredibly difficult. It felt, he says, like taking three steps forward and two steps back every single week. Eventually, he reached a crossroads. **He could continue chasing medications that weren't working, or he could choose surgery and give himself the opportunity for a different future.**

"THE OPERATION WAS PLANNED, BUT THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT ANY LESS FRIGHTENING."

On 2nd May, **he underwent a laparoscopic subtotal colectomy**. The operation involved removing his colon through several small incisions and creating an ileostomy, where the end of the small intestine is brought through the abdominal wall to form a stoma.

"ALTHOUGH THE SURGERY WAS PLANNED RATHER THAN AN EMERGENCY, THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT ANY LESS FRIGHTENING."

Like many people facing major surgery, his mind filled with questions. **Would he ever lift weights again? Would people look at him differently? What would life with a stoma actually be like? What if something went wrong?** They were the thoughts that keep many patients awake at night, and he was no different.

But the moment that surprised him most came after the operation. **When he first saw his stoma, he expected fear, sadness or even regret. Instead, he felt pride.** He was proud of everything he had endured to reach that point. Proud that he had made it through surgery. Proud that he had chosen a path that offered him the possibility of getting his life back. **In a way he never expected, that little piece of intestine sticking out of his stomach represented freedom.**

"WHEN I FIRST SAW MY STOMA, I EXPECTED FEAR. INSTEAD, I FELT PRIDE."

Continue on the next page

STARTING AGAIN CONTINUED

His recovery proved more complicated than anticipated. **Initially expected to spend around five to seven days in hospital, he remained there for 16 days after developing a chyle leak**, a complication where lymphatic fluid leaks following surgery after damage to lymphatic vessels. Doctors initially believed he may have developed an infection before identifying the real cause. **It was another obstacle in what had already been a long journey**. Yet amid the setbacks came moments that genuinely shocked him.

"BEING ABLE TO HAVE MILK IN MY COFFEE AND EAT BREAD AND BUTTER AGAIN FELT LIFE-CHANGING."

For years, food had become something to fear. Every meal came with uncertainty and anxiety over how his body would react. After surgery, that fear began to disappear. He could have milk in his coffee again. He could eat bread and butter. He could enjoy chocolate. Even foods containing onion and garlic - **things he had avoided for years could once again become part of his diet without leaving him doubled over in pain or constantly running to the toilet.** To many people, those moments might seem insignificant. To him, they felt life-changing.

"THAT LITTLE PIECE OF INTESTINE STICKING OUT OF MY STOMACH REPRESENTED FREEDOM."

Fitness has always been central to his life, making the physical changes after surgery particularly difficult to accept. **Just one month before surgery, he was still powerlifting and trying to rebuild his strength**. At his heaviest competition weight a few years ago, he weighed around 80kg. Just days after surgery, his weight had fallen to approximately 65kg.

Watching years of hard work disappear almost overnight was emotionally challenging.

At the moment, he hasn't returned to training, but when he does, he knows he will be starting from the ground up. **His priority is rebuilding his core strength, recovering properly and laying solid foundations for the future rather than rushing back too soon.**

His long-term ambition remains clear. He wants to return to powerlifting. He also wants to challenge one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding stoma that they prevent people from living active lives. The reality, he says, is very different.

Many people with stomas run marathons, compete in sport, lift weights and live incredibly active lives. Recovery takes time, but a stoma doesn't have to mean the end of physical goals. For some people, it creates the opportunity to pursue them again. **While his physical recovery continues, he admits the biggest challenge has often been mental.** Surgery changes more than your body. It changes how you see yourself. Continue on the next page

STARTING AGAIN CONTINUED

He is still learning to accept a body that looks different to the one he has known for nearly 30 years. The scars are permanent. The stoma is permanent, at least for now. **There are days when confidence comes easily. There are days when it doesn't.** One thing that has helped has been getting outside. He has made a conscious effort to spend time in nature every day, moving his body and clearing his mind.

"RECOVERY ISN'T JUST PHYSICAL - IT'S MENTAL TOO."

His journey may not yet be over. Future options include a proctectomy, often nicknamed "Barbie Butt" surgery, which involves removing the rectum and permanently closing the area, or a J-pouch procedure, where surgeons create an internal pouch from the small intestine to allow bowel movements without a permanent stoma. **For now, though, his focus is on healing.** He also hopes to use his experience to help others navigating chronic illness, stomas and major life changes.

Fitness played a huge role in helping him cope before surgery, and he wants to show that strength training and exercise can remain accessible, regardless of the challenges people face.

When asked where he sees himself five years from now, his answer isn't about numbers in the gym or career milestones. Instead, he hopes to be healthier in both body and mind while helping and inspiring other people along the way. And if someone was sitting in a hospital bed today having just been told they needed a stoma, this is what he would say:

"THIS ISN'T THE END OF YOUR STORY. IT'S THE FIRST PAGE OF A BRAND-NEW CHAPTER."

There is, however, one final detail that perfectly sums up his outlook. **He named his stoma Kyle. After surgery, he developed a chyle leak, and after hearing doctors repeat the word "chyle" so many times, the name simply stuck. Now, he says with a smile:**

"KYLE AND I ARE GETTING ALONG QUITE WELL THESE DAYS."

"I'M LEARNING TO ACCEPT A BODY THAT LOOKS DIFFERENT, BUT IT'S ALSO A BODY THAT HAS FOUGHT INCREDIBLY HARD."

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

THE SPACE BETWEEN GRIEF & GRATITUDE

Tonya Kelly's raw and powerful journey through invisible illness, emergency ostomy surgery, and the emotional road to healing, self-acceptance and strength.

"YOU CAN BE GRATEFUL TO BE ALIVE AND STILL GRIEVE THE LIFE YOU LOST."

"PEOPLE SEE ME SMILING. THEY DON'T SEE ME FIGHTING TO SURVIVE INSIDE."

"YOUR OSTOMY IS NOT THE END OF YOUR STORY - IT'S THE REASON YOU STILL HAVE ONE TO TELL."

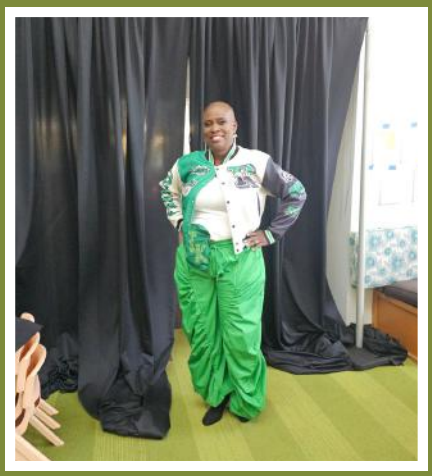
A STORY OF RESILIENCE
FROM COLUMBUS, OHIO, USA

ISSUE 02
SUMMER EDITION

"SURVIVAL CHANGES YOU. SOMETIMES PHYSICALLY. SOMETIMES EMOTIONALLY. SOMETIMES BOTH AT ONCE."

CONFIDENCE

EMPOWERING



INSPIRATIONAL

"SOME WOUNDS AREN'T VISIBLE - BUT THEY STILL RESHAPE YOUR ENTIRE LIFE."

THE SPACE BETWEEN GRIEF & GRATITUDE

INSIDE ONE WOMAN'S RAW JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE AS AN OSTOMATE

About: Tonya Kelly, M.Ed Columbus, Ohio,
Written By Gemma Louise McNamara

Behind every ostomy is a story most people never see. Not just the surgeries or the scars, but the **emotional rebuilding** that happens afterward - the grief, the fear, the identity shifts, and the quiet resilience it takes to keep going when life no longer looks the way it once did. For Tonya Kelly, becoming an ostomate was never simply a medical procedure. It was the result of years spent battling an **invisible condition** that slowly changed every part of her life. After two exhausting years searching for answers, Tonya was diagnosed with **neurogenic bowel and bladder** caused by nerve damage and herniated discs - conditions that ultimately led to emergency ostomy surgery. But while the diagnosis explained her symptoms, it could not prepare her for the emotional aftermath that followed.

"Nobody warns you that you may grieve the person you used to be."

For many ostomates, survival comes with a complicated emotional cost. **Tonya openly describes the deep disconnect she felt with her body after surgery** - mourning her independence, confidence, femininity, and sense of normalcy all at once. While the outside world often focuses on recovery, she says few people truly understand what it means to emotionally survive life after an ostomy. **The fear of leaks. The anxiety of leaving home. The exhaustion of pretending to be okay.** These are the realities many patients quietly carry behind closed doors. And yet, despite how isolating the experience can feel, conversations around ostomy life often remain hidden beneath forced positivity and silence.

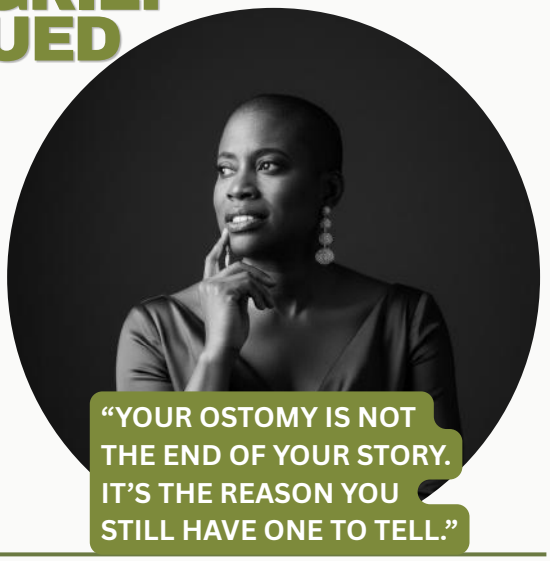
Neurogenic bowel and bladder conditions affect far more than physical health. They impact confidence, intimacy, identity, mental health, and daily functioning in ways that are difficult for others to fully understand.

"There is a grief that comes with watching your own body stop feeling like home."

Continue on the next page

THE SPACE BETWEEN GRIEF & GRATITUDE CONTINUED

Tonya describes how **depression and isolation** slowly crept into her life as she struggled to adjust to a body that no longer felt familiar. From the outside, **she continued showing up - teaching, encouraging others, and carrying on with daily life**. But internally, she was navigating grief most people never saw. Her story highlights an important truth within the ostomy community: **survival is not always graceful, inspirational, or easy. Sometimes survival simply means waking up and trying again.**



"YOUR OSTOMY IS NOT THE END OF YOUR STORY. IT'S THE REASON YOU STILL HAVE ONE TO TELL."

"HEALING BEGAN THE MOMENT SILENCE ENDED."

One of the most powerful parts of Tonya's journey has been her willingness to speak openly about the emotional realities of becoming an ostomate. **Through writing and therapy, she began processing the grief she had spent so long suppressing.** Sharing her story became part of her healing and in turn, became a source of comfort for others navigating similar experiences. In a world where many ostomates feel pressured to hide their struggles, **her honesty offers something deeply needed: visibility. Not polished perfection. Not toxic positivity. Just truth. And sometimes, truth is what helps people feel less alone.**

"You can be deeply grateful to be alive while still grieving what you lost."

Tonya's story reminds readers that resilience does not always look fearless. Sometimes resilience looks like:

- SURVIVING HARD DAYS
- LEARNING TO ACCEPT CHANGE
- REBUILDING CONFIDENCE
- ASKING FOR HELP
- CHOOSING NOT TO GIVE UP

Her journey reflects the emotional complexity so many ostomates experience but rarely discuss publicly. And perhaps that is what makes stories like hers so important.

Because representation matters. Honesty matters. And vulnerability has the power to connect people in ways silence never can. For anyone currently struggling to accept life with an ostomy.

Your story Isn't Over ;

Tonya's message is simple but powerful: You are still worthy. You are still whole. And your story is not over.

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL *NEVER* WALK ALONE.

Lauren KELLY

A STORY OF SURVIVAL, STRENGTH AND NEVER GIVING UP.

From a teenage diagnosis to life-threatening sepsis, countless surgeries, intestinal failure and palliative care – Lauren's journey is raw, real and incredibly inspiring.

"I don't regret fighting hard. You can find smiles and happiness in the small things."

LIVING WITH
ULCERATIVE COLITIS, CROHN'S DISEASE, INTESTINAL FAILURE, GASTROPARESIS, PCOS, ENDOMETRIOSIS, POTS AND MORE.

SEPTIC SHOCK. 9.6% CHANCE OF SURVIVAL. SHE KEPT FIGHTING.

Still Here

A young woman's extraordinary fight through pain, loss and the life she never expected to live.

You're absolutely allowed to have hard days.

BE PROUD OF YOU

STILL HERE

LAUREN KELLY'S EXTRAORDINARY FIGHT THROUGH SEPSIS, INTESTINAL FAILURE AND THE LIFE SHE NEVER EXPECTED TO LIVE.

"They told me I had ulcerative colitis and from that day my life changed."

For years, Lauren Kelly's body has been at war with itself. **What began as a teenage struggle with ulcerative colitis became a relentless cycle of sepsis, organ failure, emergency surgeries, intestinal failure, and near-death experiences.** Yet through unimaginable suffering, she continues to speak openly about survival, grief, chronic illness, and finding hope in the smallest moments.

There are illnesses that change your life slowly. And then there are illnesses that arrive like a tidal wave, tearing apart every future you imagined for yourself. For Lauren Kelly, it started in her early teens with symptoms she tried desperately to push through while navigating school life: bleeding, urgency, exhaustion, and severe pain.

At first, there were only questions. Blood tests. Hospital appointments. Waiting. Then came the answer that changed everything. **Her inflammation markers came back at over 3,000 - levels that should have been below 50.**

She was urgently admitted for testing. When she woke up surrounded by doctors and her parents, she already knew. Her mother lived with inflammatory bowel disease. Lauren recognised the booklets in their hands before they even spoke. **She was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis.** And from that moment onward, childhood ended.

"THEY GAVE ME A 9.6% CHANCE OF SURVIVAL"

Growing Up Inside Hospitals

While most teenagers were worrying about exams, friendships, and futures, Lauren's adolescence became consumed by **invasive treatments and relentless hospital admissions.** Chemotherapy, Infusions, Injections, Steroids. Procedures, Pain.

All while trying to complete her GCSEs and A-levels. The disease didn't simply interrupt her youth it consumed it.

Yet despite the constant illness, Lauren remained determined. **She earned a scholarship and began studying to become a children's nurse in Birmingham**, wanting to care for others even while she herself was desperately unwell. But at 19 years old, her life nearly ended. Continue on the next page

STILL HERE CONTINUED

Lauren's large intestine perforated.
Sepsis spread rapidly through her body. The pain, she says, was **"absolutely indescribable."** She lay in resuscitation surrounded by doctors, her family, and her partner as medical staff explained the reality: **without emergency surgery, she would die. She needed her large intestine removed immediately. Surgeons would create a permanent ileostomy.**

Then came the statistic no teenager should ever hear. **"They gave me a 9.6% chance of survival."** She underwent emergency surgery and was **placed into an induced coma** in intensive care. When she woke, she was still critically septic.

Machines surrounded her. Blood transfusions ran continuously. Monitors beeped constantly as doctors fought to keep her alive. One week later, she was rushed back into surgery to wash infection from her abdomen and pelvis. **Recovery became agony measured in hours rather than days. And still, it wasn't over.**

Lauren made it home for only two days before collapsing once more. Sepsis had returned. Fluid had flooded both lungs — over 1.5 litres on each side. **Chest drains were inserted to save her life.**

"I remember if I laid down I couldn't breathe. It was absolutely petrifying."

Again, ICU staff surrounded her. Again, she thought she was dying. When she finally recovered enough to return home, she faced a new reality: **relearning how to walk, how to move, and how to manage life with an ileostomy.** But before her body could fully recover, another emergency struck.

A bowel obstruction required further surgery to remove part of her small intestine and reform the ileostomy.
Recovery began again.
And again. And again.

Four Major Abdominal Surgeries and Still Fighting
Although her colon had been removed, Lauren's rectal stump remained severely inflamed with proctitis. **Infusion treatments failed**. She bled daily. Eventually, surgeons informed her the rectum also needed removal. **The operation came with another devastating possibility: losing the ability to have children.**

Days after surgery, she became septic once more. Emergency surgery followed. Part of her bowel was removed again. Her ileostomy was reformed again. **Her abdominal scar was reopened for the fourth time.**

"Reopening my large abdominal scar for the fourth time was agonising."

She was far from home and didn't even have time to see her family before being taken into theatre. Recovery left her unable to sit for weeks.
Even the journey home was unbearable.

Continue on the next page

STILL HERE CONTINUED

Pain Beyond Morphine

As scar tissue and adhesions worsened, **Lauren began suffering constant bowel blockages and violent vomiting** regardless of what she ate. A CT scan revealed loops in her small bowel requiring yet another emergency surgery. When she woke afterward, **the pain was so extreme that even intravenous morphine could not touch it.** **"I screamed and screamed for 24 hours."** Doctors attempted sedation. Nothing worked. Eventually, anaesthetists inserted a continuous epidural that remained in place for a week while sepsis was treated with powerful IV antibiotics. Then came rehabilitation once more. Learning to walk again had become part of survival.

Intestinal Failure

Years of repeated surgeries left Lauren's intestines damaged beyond function. She lost the ability to eat. Even soft foods caused obstruction and vomiting. She lost dangerous amounts of weight. Doctors inserted an **NG tube**, then later a **PEG feeding tube** directly into her stomach. Tests confirmed **gastroparesis and bowel dysmotility.** Eventually, even tube feeding caused blockages. The verdict came next: Intestinal failure. Doctors started **Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN)**, a last-resort form of feeding delivered directly into the bloodstream through a central line that bypasses the digestive system entirely. TPN kept her alive but introduced terrifying new risks. Bloodstream infections. Blood clots. Liver failure. Sepsis. Every interaction with the line had to remain completely sterile. But **despite precautions, the infections came anyway.**

Christmas in Isolation

Lauren was transferred to a specialist intestinal failure hospital. Routine blood cultures revealed infection almost immediately. Her PICC line was removed. She was **septic again. Without a safe line, she could not receive nutrition**. She spent Christmas starving in hospital while doctors fought to clear the infection.

"It was Christmas, and I felt so alone."

Over the following months, multiple replacement lines became infected with MRSA in her bloodstream. She remained hospitalised for four months. Finally discharged home with TPN, she hoped stability might come at last. Instead, things became even worse.

"The Doctors Informed Me I Was Dying"

One night, Lauren's partner found her barely responsive in bed. Her blood pressure had collapsed. Her temperature exceeded 40°C. She was in **septic shock**. Paramedics rushed her to hospital under blue lights. In resuscitation, fluid replacement failed to stabilise her blood pressure. She was transferred immediately to ICU. Her **kidneys began failing. Her liver began failing**. Lines were inserted into her neck.

Machines surrounded her bed. Against overwhelming odds, she survived. But the cycle repeated. Again. And again. And again. Each new line became infected. Each infection triggered septic shock. **Each ICU admission pushed her body further toward collapse.**

One fungal bloodstream infection spread into her eye and partially stole the vision in her left eye. She developed meningitis. She required injections directly into the eye before undergoing **emergency eye surgery in Oxford.** After months of repeated life-threatening infections, one surgeon finally admitted there was nothing left they could do.

Continue on the next page

STILL HERE CONTINUED

A Blood Clot on the Brain
Transferred yet again to another hospital, Lauren soon **developed excruciating headaches and paralysis.** For a week she deteriorated before finally receiving an MRI scan. It revealed a blood clot on her brain. She was started on lifelong blood-thinning injections. Soon afterward, another feeding line became infected. Another ICU admission followed. This time her blood pressure dropped into the 40s. **Her organs began failing once more. Her consultant eventually delivered devastating news. There was nothing else they could offer.**

"All I could think is, I'm gonna die."

The Doctor Who Held Her Hand
Desperate for answers, Lauren's family took a final chance and travelled to London. There, in another hospital, **a gastroenterology consultant sat beside her bed, held her hand, and made a promise.**

"He told me he'd fight with me."

For the first time in a long time, **someone refused to give up on her.** The intestinal failure team managed to place another line and stabilise her condition. But even then, the fight never stopped. Months later, another episode of septic shock landed her back in ICU, where palliative care teams discussed the reality that the infections would likely continue until they eventually killed her. **Lauren was forced to make impossible decisions about her future care.**

Today, Lauren lives with; A permanent ileostomy, Intestinal failure, A PEG tube draining her stomach, Daily TPN through a central line, Ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, Gastroparesis , PCOS, Endometriosis & POTS, Severe medical CPTSD and Palliative care support.

The young athlete who **once played football and excelled academically now spends many days confined to bed in relentless pain and exhaustion**. And yet, even now, she refuses to let suffering completely define her.

"I don't regret fighting hard though. You can find smiles and happiness in the small things."

She speaks lovingly about sitting in the garden, watching dogs wag their tails, and the **unwavering support of her family and partner of 11 years who has remained beside her throughout every ICU admission, surgery, and septic crisis.**

Perhaps the most powerful part of Lauren's story is not simply the scale of what she has endured - but the compassion she still offers others despite it. **She speaks openly about the grief that chronic illness creates.** Not just physical suffering, but mourning the life you once imagined.

"I think one of the worst things about having chronic illnesses is how sometimes it just breaks you."

Yet even in that grief, Lauren believes connection matters. Support matters. Being seen matters.

"After a period of inconsolable grief you have to keep going on and on again."

And above all else, she wants others with chronic illness to know they are not alone.

Lauren Kelly's story is not simply about illness. It is about endurance. About surviving things most people cannot even imagine. About continuing to find humanity after repeated trauma. About choosing, somehow, to keep loving people after years spent fighting for your own life. Her body carries scars from countless surgeries.

Her life looks nothing like the one she once planned. But her story reaches far beyond suffering alone. It is a story about resilience in its rawest form.

And for every person living silently with chronic illness, medical trauma, disability, or grief, Lauren's words leave a lasting reminder: **Even on the hardest days, your existence still matters. And you should be so proud of you.**

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

Dana GEBRIAN

AGE: 48
MONMOUTH BEACH,
NEW JERSEY, USA
ILEOSTOMY

"I WALKED THROUGH THE FIRE AND CAME OUT WEARING HEELS."

FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM

HOW SURGERY GAVE DANA HER LIFE BACK

DATING, CONFIDENCE & OWNING YOUR STORY

DANA ON LOVE, VULNERABILITY AND KNOWING YOUR WORTH

"I THOUGHT MY LIFE WAS OVER. THEN I REALISED I GOT MY LIFE BACK."

"EVERYONE HAS BAGGAGE. MINE IS SIMPLY DESIGNED BY ME."

BEYOND DIAGNOSIS.
BEYOND SURGERY.
Beyond limits.

FINDING JOY, PURPOSE AND A COMMUNITY THAT GETS IT.

INSPIRATION | SUPPORT | COMMUNITY | CONFIDENCE

WWW.UNPOUCHED.CO.UK

DANA GEBRIAN: DESIGNING HER OWN BAGGAGE

48 | Monmouth Beach, New Jersey, USA
Written By: Gemma Louise McNamara

"I walked through the fire and came out wearing heels."

Some people survive difficult chapters in life. Others rewrite them entirely. Dana Gebrian belongs firmly in the second category. At 48, the **New Jersey-based advocate, speaker and creator** behind @agirlwithbaggage has become a familiar face within the ostomy and chronic illness community.

Her message is refreshingly simple: **your diagnosis does not define you, your scars are nothing to apologise for, and confidence isn't something you wait for, it's something you decide to own.** Spend even a few minutes scrolling through her content and you'll quickly understand why so many people are drawn to her. There is honesty, humour, style and a genuine warmth that makes people feel seen.

But behind that confidence is a journey that has been anything but easy. **Diagnosed with ulcerative colitis at just 17 years old**, Dana entered adulthood carrying challenges most of her peers could never fully understand.

While others were planning futures, building careers and discovering who they wanted to become, she was also navigating chronic illness, unpredictable symptoms and the uncertainty that comes with living in a body that doesn't always cooperate. **Years later, a diagnosis of Crohn's disease added another layer to an already complex journey.** Yet despite everything, Dana kept moving forward. She built a career. She became a mother. She navigated marriage and divorce. She showed up for the people who needed her, often while quietly battling symptoms nobody else could see.

"My biggest challenge before my ileostomy was balancing the chronic fatigue, the pain, the endless bathroom trips, my career, being a hands-on mom, all while keeping up the facade of being fine."

It's a statement that will resonate with countless people living with invisible illness. The balancing act. The pretending. The constant effort required simply to appear okay. **For decades, surgery was something Dana feared.** Like many people living with inflammatory bowel disease, she worried about what life would look like afterwards. She worried about the unknown. Then, at 43, that moment arrived. A permanent ileostomy changed everything. But not in the way she expected.

"I thought my life was over. Then I realised I got my life back."

It is perhaps the most powerful sentence in Dana's story. Because while many people focus on what surgery takes away, **Dana talks openly about what hers gave back.** Freedom. Energy. Confidence. The ability to participate in life without constantly calculating where the nearest bathroom might be. **The ability to stop surviving and start living.** These days, she laughs when asked about the biggest challenge she faces.

"Now? My biggest challenge is choosing what outfit to wear."

The answer perfectly captures the spirit that has become synonymous with @agirlwithbaggage. Dana doesn't minimise the realities of chronic illness. She simply refuses to let them have the final word.

When Dana was first diagnosed, there were no online support groups, Instagram communities or creators openly sharing their experiences. **Information was limited.** Connection was difficult. And finding someone who truly understood could feel impossible. That experience stayed with her.

Years later, it became the foundation for **@agirlwithbaggage. Part support network, part confidence movement and part reality check,** the platform has become a space where people navigating illness, surgery and major life changes can feel understood. The name itself says everything.

"Everyone has baggage. Mine is simply designed by me."

It's witty, memorable and completely authentic to Dana's outlook on life. Because while her ileostomy bag may be visible, she is quick to point out that everyone is carrying something. Loss. Trauma. Heartbreak. Illness. Fear. **The difference isn't whether we carry baggage. It's what we choose to do with it.** Through her content, Dana encourages people to stop hiding and start owning their stories. Not because it's always easy. But because there is freedom in authenticity. Continue on the next page

DANA GEBRIAN: DESIGNING HER OWN BAGGAGE

CONTINUED

For Dana, **advocacy doesn't begin and end with social media.** It happens in conversations. In hospital rooms. In support groups. And in the messages exchanged between people who simply need someone to understand.

She regularly supports individuals preparing for life-changing surgery, offering reassurance from a place of lived experience. When someone is terrified about what comes next, Dana can offer something few professionals can. - Proof. Proof that life continues. Proof that confidence returns. Proof that happiness remains possible. **Sometimes, hearing those words from someone who has actually lived it can change everything.**

"Living my life out loud and telling my story has helped me heal. The baggage I carry is designed by me."

Her openness has given countless people permission to tell their own stories too. And in a world where ostomies are still rarely discussed openly, that visibility matters.

One of the topics Dana speaks about most candidly is dating. It's an area many ostomates worry about but few people feel comfortable discussing openly. How do you explain your bag? When do you tell someone? Will they accept it? For Dana, the answer begins with confidence.

"As we get older, everyone carries baggage. What matters is how you wear it, own it, and make it a part of who you are."

There is something incredibly empowering about the way she reframes the conversation. **Instead of focusing on what makes someone different, she focuses on what makes them remarkable.** Strength. Resilience. Character. Life experience. The things that truly matter.

"Know your worth and know that you are worth it. Your baggage should never be the focal point. Your fabulousness should be."

It's advice that extends far beyond the ostomy community. In many ways, it is a reminder for all of us.

If there is one thing Dana wants people to take away from her story, it is this: **Your life is not over. Not after diagnosis. Not after surgery. Not after the moments that leave you questioning what comes next.** There will be difficult days**.** There will be setbacks. There will be moments of fear. But there can also be joy, confidence, connection and a future that looks very different from the one you imagined, sometimes better.

Dana knows this because she has lived it. She has walked through uncertainty. She has faced loss**. She has rebuilt herself more than once. And somehow, through it all, she has emerged stronger, louder and more unapologetically herself than ever before.**

"I walked through the fire and came out wearing heels."

It's more than a quote. It's Dana Gebrian's story in a single sentence. And for the thousands of people finding comfort, confidence and community. It's a reminder that they can do the same. **Follow Dana's journey because sometimes the person who helps you believe in yourself is someone who has already walked through the fire.**

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

Leroy HUFFMAN

SURVIVOR. FIGHTER. CAREGIVER.

Struck by a car travelling 60MPH. Left with life-changing injuries, a colostomy and a mountain of challenges.

THIS IS LEROY'S STORY OF SURVIVAL, FAITH AND SECOND CHANCES.

INSIDE LEROY'S JOURNEY:

- **13 SURGERIES IN 2 MONTHS**
  Fighting for his life.
- **1 MONTH IN A MEDICALLY INDUCED COMA**
  A battle no one saw.
- **$500,000 IN BILLS**
  No insurance. No help. Just him.
- **11 MONTHS CLEAN & SOBER**
  Faith. Recovery. Purpose.
- **CAREGIVER**
  Now helping others find hope.

> "THE CAR HIT ME SO HARD IT DESTROYED MY RECTUM AND ANUS."

> "MY LIFE IS SO MUCH BETTER THANKS TO GOD."

REAL PEOPLE.
REAL STORIES.
REAL STRENGTH.

PROOF THAT EVEN AFTER THE UNTHINKABLE, THERE IS STILL HOPE.

LEROY HUFFMAN: A Second Chance at Life

Written By: Gemma Louise McNamara

By any measure, Leroy Huffman should not be here. **Three years ago, the 44-year-old Phoenix resident was struck by a car traveling approximately 60 miles per hour.** The impact left him with catastrophic injuries that required months of hospitalization, multiple surgeries, and a complete reimagining of life as he knew it.

"The car hit me so hard it destroyed my rectum and anus."

Doctors removed seven feet of Leroy's intestines. Surgeons inserted two eight-inch plates to reconstruct and stabilize his shattered pelvis. Over two months, he underwent 13 surgeries as medical teams fought to save his life and repair the extensive damage to his colon. **For one month, Leroy remained in a medically induced coma.**

"When I woke up, everything had changed."

Despite repeated surgical attempts, **the damage to his colon proved too severe. Leroy was left with a permanent colostomy** a life-saving surgery that became part of his new reality. The physical recovery was only part of the battle. **After surviving a collision that nearly killed him, Leroy learned that the driver who struck him carried no insurance**. The result was more than $500,000 in medical bills, adding financial hardship to an already overwhelming situation.

"I survived the accident, but I still had to figure out how to rebuild my life."

LEROY AND HIS MUM.

Like many ostomates, Leroy faced challenges that extended far beyond the operating room. Adjusting to life with a colostomy required patience, perseverance, and a willingness to keep moving forward despite setbacks. **Through it all, his faith became a source of strength.**

"My life is so much better today thanks to God."

Today, Leroy is celebrating another milestone: 11 months clean and sober. Recovery has given him a renewed sense of purpose and gratitude. Rather than allowing his experiences to define him, he chose to use them to help others. **He now works as a caregiver, providing support and compassion to people facing challenges of their own.**

"I'm proud to be helping people now."

Leroy's story is one of survival, resilience, and second chances. His colostomy may be part of his journey, but it is not the whole story. The whole story is about perseverance: the determination to keep going after trauma, to find purpose after loss, and to build a meaningful life one day at a time. **For Leroy, survival was only the beginning.**

Tiktok: SoberWithLeroy / @leroy.contreras

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

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THE STOMA FAIRY: EMILY GRIFFITHS AND THE POWER OF BEING SEEN.

"I WAS TOLD I HAD DAYS LEFT TO LIVE UNLESS I AGREED TO A STOMA SURGERY."

"A STOMA BAG DOESN'T MAKE YOU UGLY. IT GIVES YOU A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE."

After years of battling Ulcerative Colitis and facing a life-saving ileostomy, Emily transformed fear, grief, and isolation into confidence and advocacy.

THE STOMA FAIRY: EMILY GRIFFITHS AND THE POWER OF BEING SEEN

Written By: Gemma Louise McNamara

When I first spoke to Emily Lauren Griffiths better known online as The Stoma Fairy - what struck me wasn't just the weight of her story, but the clarity of how she now tells it. **There is no hesitation when she speaks about the years she lost to illness, or the life she almost didn't get to live.**

She is 27, from Sunderland, and living with an ileostomy stoma following years of severe inflammatory bowel disease. But to understand who she is now, you have to understand who she was before everything changed.

"I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis when I was 19... I just wanted to be a normal girl."

Emily describes being diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis at 19 as the moment her life split in two. Like many young people, she was just beginning adulthood — watching friends go out, build independence, and enjoy a kind of freedom her body would no longer allow. What followed was not only a diagnosis, **but a second condition that would shape everything: enteropathic arthritis. It was invisible to others, but relentless for her.**

The hardest part, she explains, wasn't just the pain — it was the isolation. **She hid her illness for years,** masking flare-ups and withdrawing when she couldn't cope. But in doing so, she also became invisible in another way: misunderstood.

"With an invisible disability, I think many people can relate to feeling like you're not believed."

That lack of belief from doctors, from people around her became almost as damaging as the illness itself. **Like so many living with inflammatory bowel disease, Emily describes the emotional toll of having to constantly prove she was unwell.** As her condition worsened, she began to explore surgical options. Stoma surgery was presented to her as a possibility of relief, but it came with heavy warnings: no guarantee it would cure her arthritis, and a potential 50% reduction in fertility.

At 19, that was too much to process. She stepped away from the idea. But her body would eventually make that decision for her. **By 24, Emily was critically unwell and hospitalised. Doctors told her she had days left to live unless she agreed to emergency surgery.**

"I was told I had days left to live unless I agreed to a stoma surgery."

Even then, she says, she didn't feel strong she felt exhausted beyond anything she could describe. **Years of chronic illness had worn her down to the point where survival itself felt uncertain.** What changed everything wasn't sudden bravery, but her mother's insistence. Her mom begged her to have the operation. Emily agreed. Not because she had processed it. Not because she felt ready. But because **she didn't want to lose the chance to live. The surgery saved her life but what came after was something she wasn't prepared for.**

Waking up with a stoma, she describes, felt disorienting. There had been no time for preparation, no real understanding of what it would look like or mean. And mentally, the adjustment was brutal.

"I couldn't even look at it for months without breaking down."

She speaks openly about the shock not just of the physical change, but of the identity crisis that followed. **As a young woman who had never seen anyone like herself represented, she struggled to reconcile her body with how she felt she should look and live.**

Continue on the next page

THE STOMA FAIRY: EMILY GRIFFITHS AND THE POWER OF BEING SEEN - CONTINUED

For months, she avoided mirrors. She avoided acceptance. She avoided herself.

“I was convinced I would never feel normal or pretty again,” she told me. “I thought I’d never be able to dress in a girly way again.”

What makes Emily’s story different now is not that those fears didn’t exist — but that she refused to let them become permanent. The turning point came slowly, almost quietly. **She began personalising her stoma bags with fabric pens, matching them to her outfits.** What started as a coping mechanism became something far more powerful: reclamation. **She was no longer hiding her stoma — she was integrating it into who she was.** And then came TikTok. At first, her videos were just personal expression. But gradually, something shifted. People began to respond — not with pity, but recognition. They saw themselves in her. They saw possibility.

"People started saying I was helping them accept their own stomas."

That response reshaped her entire purpose online. **Emily began openly showing her stoma — something she describes as “controversial” in some spaces, but necessary in her eyes.** She believes visibility matters more than comfort. That people making life-altering decisions deserve truth, not silence.

It is this belief that led to the name The Stoma Fairy — given to her by followers who saw something unexpectedly soft, creative, and even magical in how she presented herself alongside something so medically misunderstood. **What she has built is not just a platform, but a form of representation that didn’t exist for her when she needed it most.** And while her following remains modest at around 15,000, she is clear about what matters more.

"It’s not about numbers - it’s about the individuals it’s helping."

Today, Emily speaks about her stoma not as something that took her life away, but something that gave it back. The surgery that once terrified her also cured her arthritis, restoring a quality of life she never thought she would experience again. Her journey is not framed in simple gratitude or inspiration but in complexity.

There are still difficult days. Still challenges. Still moments of adjustment. But there is also something else now: ownership. And for Emily Griffiths, that is everything. Because what once felt like an ending has become, slowly and painfully and honestly, a beginning.

"A stoma bag doesn’t make you ugly. It gives you a second chance at life."

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

Clare Pritchard has faced years of health challenges, but through resilience, faith and determination, she continues to **inspire others** while **advocating** for the ostomy community.

> *Even though the stoma can bring me challenges, I would not ever go back to the way I was. It has given me freedom.*

STRENGTH.
PURPOSE.
FREEDOM.
MY STORY.

> *I am a true warrior, and there is nothing I cannot face.*

REAL STORIES • SUPPORT • EMPOWERMENT • COMMUNITY • HOPE

MORE THAN A STOMA: CLARE'S STORY OF STRENGTH, FAITH AND FREEDOM

For much of her life, Clare Pritchard was told her symptoms were something she simply had to live with. **As a child, she was told she had a "lazy bowel." As an adult, the explanation became IBS.** Yet despite following advice and trying to manage her symptoms, her health continued to deteriorate. I**t would take a medical emergency and years of investigations before she finally received the answers she had spent a lifetime searching for.**

Today, at 47, Clare lives in the West Midlands, is a proud nanny to two beautiful granddaughters, **runs her own travel business and works as a personal shopper.** Those who know her describe her as caring, determined, and quietly funny once she feels comfortable. But behind that warmth is a woman who has endured extraordinary challenges and emerged with an unwavering commitment to helping others. Clare's journey began long before she ever heard the word "ostomy."

For years, her severe bowel problems were dismissed. She was encouraged to increase her fibre intake and manage symptoms that never seemed to improve. Instead, her condition worsened, affecting every aspect of daily life. **Everything changed in 2015 when she collapsed at home and was rushed to hospital.**

Doctors discovered she was severely impacted with stool that she could not pass. For the first time, her symptoms were taken seriously. She was referred to specialists at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where **extensive investigations finally uncovered the root cause of her lifelong struggles.**

"It wasn't until 2015, when I collapsed at home and was admitted to hospital, that I was finally taken seriously."

Following numerous tests, **Clare was diagnosed with slow transit colon issues and was offered a stoma in 2016.** What many might have hoped would be the end of the story was, in reality, the beginning of a new chapter. Learning a new normal. **Clare now lives with an end ileostomy and has also been diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. Like many ostomates, the biggest challenge was not only physical but emotional.**

"The most challenging part has been adjusting emotionally and accepting the change to my body," she explains. "It took time to feel confident again and get used to the new normal."

The impact on body image and confidence was significant. Initially self-conscious and uncertain, **Clare slowly rebuilt her relationship with herself and learned to embrace life with an ostomy.**

"It took time to feel confident again and get used to the new normal."

Today, she approaches life with a balance of determination and self-awareness.

"A normal day looks like listening to my body," she says. "Not allowing it to rule me but knowing when I am at the point of burnout."

Rather than focusing on limitations, Clare has learned to focus on living.

"For me it is about trying to remain focused and live my new normal."

Although Clare has found greater confidence over time, her journey remains ongoing. **Her stoma sits very flat against her skin, creating frequent leaks and persistent skin problems that can be both physically painful and emotionally exhausting**.

She is currently preparing for further surgery in the hope of improving these complications.

"There are days when it feels like a constant battle,"

she admits. Yet despite these ongoing difficulties, she continues to move forward one day at a time.

Clare speaks warmly about her stoma care team, particularly SALTS Healthcare, where she now serves as an ambassador. **Their guidance, combined with the support of family and loved ones, helps her navigate even the toughest periods.**

"I get through it by taking things one day at a time and focusing on what I can manage in the moment." Continue on the next page

MORE THAN A STOMA: CLARE'S STORY OF STRENGTH, FAITH AND FREEDOM - CONTINUED

Ask Clare how she copes, and her answer is refreshingly honest Humour plays a huge role. So does faith. **She credits her Christian faith with helping her endure some of the darkest moments in her journey, providing strength when life has felt overwhelming**. Alongside her faith, she relies on the people around her and the professionals who continue to support her care.

These sources of strength have helped her through multiple surgeries, including a **full hysterectomy, surgical menopause, removal of her large bowel, and several operations to repair parastomal hernias.** Along the way, her stoma was even relocated from her right side to her left due to ongoing complications. Many people would understandably feel defeated after facing so much. Clare chose another path.

Despite the challenges, Clare is clear about one thing: she would never choose to go back to the life she lived before her stoma.

"Even though the stoma can bring me challenges, I would not ever go back to the way I was."

Before surgery, daily life was dominated by illness, pain and the inability to empty her bowels normally. Today, although life is far from perfect, she has gained something she once thought impossible. Freedom.

"It has given me freedom in that sense."

Her perspective is one that many newly diagnosed patients may find reassuring. While acknowledging the reality of difficult days, she also recognises how much strength she has discovered within herself.

"I am a true warrior," she says. "There is nothing I cannot face."

Clare's journey has inspired her to support others facing similar challenges. As a SALTS Healthcare ambassador, **she shares her experiences to encourage and educate fellow ostomates**. **She has also launched Oasis Escapes Travel, combining her love of travel with a passion for improving accessibility and awareness for people living with ostomies.** Through hotel reviews, travel experiences and social media, she highlights both accessibility needs and practical realities for ostomates navigating the world.

Her mission is simple: to help others realise that life does not end with a stoma. In many ways, it can begin again. A Message for anyone struggling. If Clare could speak directly to someone newly living with an ostomy, or someone currently feeling overwhelmed, her advice would be heartfelt and simple.

"Be kind to yourself."

She encourages people to take each day as it comes, reach out for support, and remember that they do not have to face their challenges alone.

"You slowly learn what works for you, and your confidence can return bit by bit."

Most importantly, she wants people to know that there is strength in connection.

"Find people who you can talk to. Don't struggle alone."

For Clare, the journey has been long, complicated and often difficult. Yet **through resilience, faith, humour and determination, she has transformed her experiences into something powerful.** Not just survival. But hope. And perhaps that is the greatest lesson her story offers: **that even in life's most challenging chapters, there is still room for freedom,** purpose and a future worth embracing.

Written By: Gemma Louise McNamara

UNPOUCHED YOUNG VOICES

HUNTER

I AM STILL HUNTER

A BRAVE WARRIOR'S STORY OF STRENGTH, FRIENDSHIP AND LIFE WITH A STOMA.

At first glance, Hunter Garrod looks like any other 12-year-old. He loves football, swimming, boxing and gaming. He's a huge Arsenal fan, enjoys playing Roblox and spending time with his bulldog, Kash.

But **Hunter's journey has been anything but ordinary**. For much of his childhood, **Hunter was living with symptoms that nobody could explain**. His stomach was swollen, he was frail, and he needed an incredible 14 sachets of laxatives every day.

Doctors believed he had chronic constipation and repeatedly reassured his family that he would grow out of it. Sadly, things weren't that simple.

For eight years, Hunter's condition went undiagnosed. While he continued to become more unwell, answers remained frustratingly out of reach. Everything changed when he was referred to Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH). There, specialists discovered that **the left side of Hunter's colon had become so stretched that it was no longer working properly.** After years of uncertainty, his family finally understood what had been causing so many problems.

"GOSH found that my left-side colon wasn't working and saved my life."

At just nine years old, Hunter **underwent surgery and received a colostomy.** Like many children facing a stoma, he wasn't quite sure what to expect. Suddenly there was a whole new way of living to learn about, from changing his bag to understanding how to care for his stoma.

"ThE FACT I had a bag on my stomach surprised me the most."

At first, everything felt unfamiliar. **Learning how to manage a stoma takes time, patience and confidence**, and Hunter had to learn all three.

"The hardest thing to get used to was changing my stoma bag, knowing what I can eat and cleaning it."

But alongside those challenges came something wonderful. **For the first time in years, Hunter wasn't living with constant pain.**

"I feel no pain now that I have my stoma."

That change gave him the chance to focus on being a child again. **Returning to school after surgery brought a new challenge**. Hunter worried about how his friends might react and whether they would see him differently.

HUNTER IS AN AMBASSADOR FOR SALTS HEALTHCARE.

"Going back to school was different, as I didn't know how to tell my friends."

Fortunately, he soon discovered he had nothing to worry about. **His friends were kind, supportive and accepting.** They didn't make him feel different because of his stoma, and their friendship helped him regain confidence in himself.

Another important moment came when Hunter met other children and adults living with stomas. Until then, he hadn't realised how many people shared similar experiences.

"Meeting other children and people with stomas made me more confident."

Knowing he wasn't alone made a huge difference. Instead of feeling self-conscious, Hunter began to embrace what made him unique.

"I liked being different."

Today, his stoma doesn't stop him from doing the things he enjoys most. Whether he's swimming, boxing, playing football or gaming with friends, Hunter lives life to the fullest.

Continue on the next page

I AM STILL HUNTER CONTINUED

Of course, there are still extra things to think about.

"You have to be more prepared in bringing supplies everywhere you go."

But for Hunter, **being prepared is simply part of everyday life.** In fact, his stoma has become such an important part of his journey that it even has its own name. Homer.

"I am most proud of having a 'bag' stoma who I call Homer."

It's a name that reflects Hunter's positive attitude and sense of humour. **Rather than seeing his stoma as something that holds him back, he has found ways to make it part of who he is.**

Hunter's journey has also included challenges beyond his stoma. He has had to cope with **ADHD, autism, anxiety disorder, ODD and PTSD.**
That's a lot for anyone to face, especially at such a young age. Yet when Hunter talks about everything he has overcome, **he doesn't focus on the difficulties**. Instead, he focuses on what they have taught him.

"I have learnt that I am a warrior and I am so strong for a 12-year-old."

It's hard to disagree.

Today, Hunter is helping others as an ambassador for SALTS Healthcare. Through sharing his experiences, **he hopes to show other young people that life with a stoma can still be fun, active and full of opportunities.**

One of the highlights of his ambassador role was being **given the chance to design his own stoma bag**. Unsurprisingly, he chose two of his favourite things: Arsenal Football Club and Naruto. The design perfectly reflects the message Hunter wants other young people to hear.

A stoma is something you have. It isn't who you are. For any child who may be feeling nervous about surgery, worried about fitting in, or unsure about what life with a stoma might be like, **Hunter has some simple but powerful advice.**

"Everything is ok. You have got this."

And perhaps the most important lesson of all comes from Hunter himself.

"Having a stoma bag doesn't define who I am."

Because when all is said and done, Hunter isn't defined by a stoma. He's a football fan. A gamer. A swimmer. A boxer. A friend. An ambassador. A boy with big dreams and a bright future ahead of him. Most importantly of all:

"I AM STILL HUNTER, A BRAVE WARRIOR BOY."

Written By Gemma Louise McNamara

A PLATFORM FOR OSTOMATES, THEIR FAMILIES FRIENDS AND CARERS.

UNPOUCHED YOUNG VOICES

JESSICA

CONFIDENCE BEYOND THE POUCH

YOU WILL NEVER WALK ALONE.

MEET JESSICA: THE 11-YEAR-OLD CHANGING LIVES

From naming her stoma "Apple" to becoming a voice for young ostomates, Jessica is proving that courage comes in all sizes.

Some children leave a lasting impression the moment you meet them. Eleven-year-old Jessica Dowle from Liverpool is one of those children. Bright, funny and full of energy, **Jessica loves running, dancing, football, swimming and art.** After school, you'll usually find her playing out with friends, enjoying family days out or spending time with her best friend, Jax, who also has a stoma. Like most children her age, she embraces every opportunity to have fun. **What makes Jessica extraordinary is not what she's been through, but how she's chosen to live because of it.**

Jessica was just four years old when she received her colostomy. After she was born, she didn't pass meconium for the first four days of life and was later **diagnosed with large bowel dysmotility,** leading to years of chronic constipation and countless hospital visits. Looking back, **she remembers feeling frightened before her surgery.**

"I was scared because I had lots of procedures before my big operation. I don't like needles, cannulas or the taste of medicines."

It's a fear many children preparing for surgery will recognise. But once Jessica's stoma arrived, something remarkable happened. She accepted it almost immediately. In fact, she even gave it a name. Apple.

"I named it Apple because it's like a red apple,"

she says matter-of-factly. That simple act says everything about Jessica's outlook. **Rather than seeing her stoma as something to hide, she made it part of her story.**

"My stoma is a part of me, and it helps me so much every day."

While her positivity shines through, Jessica doesn't pretend life is always easy. **She has lived with diversion colitis for almost eight years,** experiencing painful flare-ups and ongoing symptoms that can make everyday life difficult. There are still challenging days, but she's learned something many adults struggle with.

"I've learnt that I need to listen to my body and know when I need to rest,"

It's a lesson that has helped her navigate life while continuing to enjoy everything she loves. And when Jessica says everything, she means it. Swimming. Football. Running. Dancing. **Nothing has stopped her from joining in.**

"I DO ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING."

Continue on the next page

MEET JESSICA: THE 11-YEAR-OLD CHANGING LIVES - CONTINUED

Perhaps one of the most heart warming parts of Jessica's journey has been the support she's received from those around her. When she returned to school, **her classmates were eager to understand her stoma.** A teddy called Buttony Bear helped explain things to her nursery friends, and ever since, Jessica has never felt the need to hide who she is.

"My friends know when I'm having a flare-up," she says. "They look after me."

Meeting other people living with a stoma has also transformed her confidence.

"Meeting other children and adults with a stoma made me realise I'm not alone."

That feeling of belonging inspired Jessica to make sure other children never feel alone either. **Over the years, she has become one of the UK's youngest advocates for children living with stomas**. She has helped organise events that bring families together, raised tens of thousands of pounds for Buttony Bear and Colostomy UK, and dedicated herself to raising awareness for young ostomates.

Her remarkable efforts have earned her several awards, including being honoured alongside her friend Jax at Westminster. For Jessica, it wasn't just about receiving recognition. It was about realising that sharing her story was making a genuine difference.

"Being honoured at Westminster made me realise everything I do is making a difference to many people living with a stoma."

Despite everything she has achieved, Jessica is still, at heart, an ordinary 11-year-old who laughs when "Apple" makes unexpected noises and loves spending time with friends. It's that honesty that makes her story so relatable. **She knows there will be difficult days. She knows life with a stoma isn't always straightforward. But she also knows it doesn't stop you living**. When I ask Jessica what she'd say to another child who has just had surgery or is waiting for their own stoma, her answer is beautifully simple.

"Be brave. Be positive. Be you. The first week or so can be scary, but it does get easier."

She also encourages children not to keep everything to themselves.

"Telling my friends about my stoma helped massively."

Before our conversation ends, Jessica leaves me with one final message—one that perfectly sums up who she is and what she hopes every young ostomate will believe.

"A stoma doesn't define who you are. It doesn't stop you from living a full, happy and active life. It may change how you do some things, but it doesn't stop you from achieving your goals or being yourself."

Jessica's journey hasn't been easy, but she has never allowed her stoma to define her. Instead, she has become a role model, fundraiser, advocate and friend to countless children and families navigating similar experiences. **Most of all, she's shown that courage doesn't have an age**. Sometimes, courage looks like facing another hospital appointment. Sometimes, it means helping someone else feel less afraid. And sometimes... It looks like an 11-year-old girl from Liverpool who named her stoma Apple.

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A DECADE OF CARE: HOW STOCARE SET OUT TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Written by: Gemma Louise McNamara

For ten years, StoCare has quietly built a reputation for something refreshingly simple: putting care before everything else. **Behind the brand is Rhodes Health, an independent family business based in the North West of England** that believes ostomy care should be kind to skin, affordable for the NHS and genuinely improve people's quality of life.

When StoCare launched in 2016, it was because there was a gap that they believed had been overlooked - independent suppliers developing quality products at value for money for the NHS.

The company focused on creating a carefully considered range designed around everyday challenges ostomates face. Their barrier films, adhesive removers and accessories are formulated using simple ingredients that are alcohol-free and fragrance-free, and are **kind to peristomal skin.** StoCare's philosophy has remained remarkably consistent over the past decade.

"Care is at the heart of everything we do."

Rhodes Health has always been committed to supporting the NHS with products that offer excellent value for money, but also has **a strong commitment to working towards a greener future.** Through the use of post-consumer recycled plastic in their cans, renewable energy business premises and an in-house sustainability policy, they care about the environment too .

"We are committed to the care and consistency we can provide – to ostomates to the NHS and the environment."

Rhodes' considered processes also extend to innovation, from their use of bag-on-valve technology in their cans to their partnership with Irish company Ostoform.

Ostoform was born out of a need to improve skin health and quality of life for people who have an ostomy. Their founder recognised that absorbency and adhesive breakdown were significant contributors to peristomal skin complications. Addressing this issue led to the creation of a revolutionary ostomy appliance component - FLOWASSIST® is designed to direct stoma output away from the skin and into the pouch, resulting in fewer leaks, improved peristomal skin health and reduced the cost of care. Through their partnership, **Rhodes Health is proud to introduce these ground-breaking products to the UK market**, including the patented FLOWASSIST® Seal and FLOWASSIST ® 2-Piece Pouch System.

For Rhodes Health, growth has never been the company's only ambition. **Their goals are to simply continue supporting NHS formularies, expand their sustainability efforts and keep delivering products that make a genuine difference.**

STOCARE AT A GLANCE

Founded: 2016
Based: Preston, North West England
Company: Independent family business
Known for:

- Kind to peristomal skin formulations
- Alcohol and fragrance free products
- Commitment to ostomates, the NHS and the environment.
- Thoughtful innovation
- Ostoform UK Distribution

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