

Health

The advice you need

Breaking the taboo

I'm no longer ashamed of my bowel issues

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True-life
**PATIENT
CASEBOOK**



My cramps intensified as I dashed down my street. But by the time I'd put my keys in the door, it was too late.

I'd soiled myself. Again. Working in a bank, I wore expensive suits.

Had immaculate hair and make-up.

But I was falling apart. It was May 2000.

Aged 29, I'd been struggling with ulcerative colitis for four years.

A long-term condition, inflaming the colon and rectum and causing ulcers.

I had spasms, diarrhoea, blood in my poo.

If I didn't reach the loo

in time, I'd mess my pants.

Now planning my wedding to my fiancé Darren, my latest meds had stopped working.

'I feel so dirty,' I sobbed to Darren in November 2000, when a flare-up left me on the loo 30 times daily.

'Everyone poos,' he soothed.

Weight was falling off me, I was even losing my hair.

'You'll die without an ileostomy,' my specialist warned me that December.

So I had the surgery to divert my small intestine out of an opening in my abdomen into a stoma bag.

Afterwards, Darren had a peek because I was too scared.

'The ileostomy is the size of a cherry tomato,' he reassured me.

As my husband says, everyone has to poo!

The bag was the size of A5 paper.

After seven weeks in hospital, I learnt to empty and clean the bag.

Up to 12 times a day.

Started to feel better too, gaining weight.

After our wedding in September 2001, me and Darren went on honeymoon to Mauritius.

I wore a bikini, even tried paragliding!

But as months passed, my rectum was leaking mucus.

'You need more surgery,' my specialist explained.

In January 2002, surgeons removed my rectum, which was diseased, and then created an internal J-shaped pouch using 30cm of my small intestine and connected it to my anus and sphincter muscles.

I had a temporary stoma while I recovered, which was closed in the March to let the J-shape pouch work.

Finally, I could poo out of my bum again.

Over the next year, I trained myself to hold on and soon I was only

pooing twice a day.

Me and Darren wanted kids. But was it possible?

'Give it a try,' my specialist advised.

Our daughter Isabella arrived in November 2003, our son Harry in June 2006.

Now, 23 years on from my op, I'm still going strong!

Sometimes, internal scarring gives me pain.

And pooing through a J pouch can be super smelly and loud – especially after drinking champagne!

So I sing on the loo to distract from my parping.

My family find it funny!

I volunteer with the Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association because struggling with bowel issues can be lonely.

But, as Darren reminds me, everyone has to poo.

So let's stop poo from being so taboo!

Find out more

The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association (IA) has been supporting people living with an ileostomy or an internal pouch since 1956. See iasupport.org.

Turn over for more health

WORDS: LOUISE BATY



Darren has been so supportive

I was losing weight – and my hair



Now I want to reassure others they're not alone