

# The Ultimate Challenges of Ulcerative Colitis

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Ulcerative Colitis is a long term condition where the colon and rectum become inflamed by ulcers on the lining. It affects one in 420 people, meaning there are about 146,000 infected people in the UK alone. The reason this disease affects so many people in severe ways is because of flare-ups. This is the extreme movement of bowels and results in painful and swollen joints, mouth ulcers and areas of red and swollen skin. In extreme cases it causes irregular heartbeat and shortage of breath. A flare-up comes from ulcers in the colon and rectum attacking healthy tissues.

Shannon Christie, 22, was diagnosed when she was 18 years of age. She said that she kept having horrendous stomach cramp. "It started to happen every day so when I went to the doctors they initially thought I had IBS (inflammatory bowel syndrome) as they thought it was stress over exams but after it kept happening test results showed it was ulcerative colitis." She also went on to say that she cannot drink certain drinks, for example fresh orange juice. She also struggles to absorb fruit and vegetables as they are, they would need to be in some form of meal. The NHS also advise that plenty of fluids are taken on board every day as ulcerative colitis makes the body very dehydrated. The health specialists also advise that people like Miss Christie split their meals into 5-6 smaller meals as opposed to three, to help the body absorb food more efficiently.

The bowel disease can make people feel isolated and extremely stressed, so it is important that people have coping mechanisms. For example, exercise helps. Shannon is currently raising money for charity by doing a dancing competition for the Highland Hospice. Also in her training she can take her mind off the disease. "It's a good way to talk to people as well." Ulcerative Colitis has not yet been cured only managed, and some think it could be genetics from generations before that cause it.