**Becky Hewson**

I once led a full and very active life. Back in 2008, I worked full time, was studying for my Masters part-time, went to the gym four times a week, captained the Cheshire women’s rugby team and also had a very hectic social life.

In the summer of 2008 I got a virus. While I recovered from the initial illness my health wasn’t the same. Work became a mammoth task, I had to sleep when I got home so I could go to rugby training and after a match I would collapse, sleeping for hours and waking feeling un-refreshed.

My symptoms worsened: I got a rash all over my body, I was constantly tired and I had a headache from the moment I woke up to the time I fell asleep.

As my health deteriorated I had to give up all my physical activity which was my life.  I realised something was seriously wrong so went to the doctor. It took a year for me to be properly diagnosed during which time my health continued to deteriorate.

Three years on from the initial virus and I was still working but barely coping. I had over 38 symptoms including flu-like symptoms, stabbing pain, cystitis, IBS, significant cognitive impairment, fainting, vertigo, headaches, muscle spasms, palpitations. The list goes on.

As the symptoms mounted in number and increased in severity my quality of life diminished.

At the worst point my life became an existence. I couldn’t read because my brain struggled to comprehend the words on the page. The cinema was way too loud. Being out in crowded places resulted in cognitive overload. I could barely walk more than 100 yards without needing to stop; I dragged my feet along the ground as I was too weak to lift them.

Going online was impossible as the screen was too bright. Texting was too painful for my hands. Phone calls weren’t possible as I couldn’t follow what people were saying. And for about six weeks I could barely string a sentence together.

This was my absolute rock bottom. Trapped by my own body with no way forward.

It was at this point that I considered suicide as a genuine means of breaking out of this hellish existence.

However, when your only options are to sink or swim, swim it is.

And so began the slow crawl back to some semblance of health

Seven years on from my lowest point and I have found a way to adjust my life to the level of health that I feel grateful to have. I now work for myself from home on a part-time basis and I am able to take my dog for a walk most days. Better yet, I’m starting to socialise and can even have a drink or two every now and again.

But there are still so many things I cannot do and so many ways that I have to restrict my life. Noise, an increased heart rate, perfume - everything must be monitored for the impact it’s having on my body to avoid triggering symptoms. Even laughing too loud or energetically can trigger a flare up.

And there are many unanswered questions. Which is why we need more funding for biomedical research so we understand the nature of this illness and so we can come up with diagnostic tests, treatment and a cure. The medical 'treatment' I received form the NHS was Victorian to non-existent. In 2018 this is completely unacceptable which is why I'm campaigning for change.

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