

GEMMA'S TB STORY: AN UNEXPECTED RELIEF

“My first symptom was weight loss. At first, I didn't think anything of it. It wasn't until I had lost a stone that I went to the doctor. By that point, I was starting to feel like it was somewhat out of control, and I didn't like it. I also suffered from terrible night sweats.

Once I had noticed the night sweats and weight loss, it was another few months before I realized I was feeling incredibly fatigued. It was like having the flu but with none of the pain. I could sleep for 13 hours a night and still need a nap in the afternoon!

Although TB was discussed and suspected at my first doctor's visit, it took six months from my GP referral until I was started on anti-TB medication. In the meantime, they were convinced it was cancer and many other nasty-sounding diseases. After numerous tests, I was finally treated for TB of the kidney.

I've always lived in South London, and although I've done a little traveling, I have no idea how I picked up TB. It is suspected that I may have first gotten it at school.

When I found out I had TB, I was actually relieved! By that point, I felt so awful that I just wanted answers. It was awful not knowing.

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The start of treatment was particularly tough. I still felt ill and lethargic, and the medication made me sick, with nausea being the worst part. My treatment lasted six months.

Contagion stigma

My family was very supportive of me during this time, but others found it more difficult. I found that no matter how much I explained to people that it was not contagious, it still had a lot of stigma surrounding it.

At the worst point of my TB, I was completely fed up but too tired to be angry about it anymore! It was a bad time for me and everyone around me. If I look at photos of me and my family from that time, I'm not the only one who looks ill! It was incredibly tough, but it has made me a stronger person.

Today, I am absolutely fine. After my treatment, I started running to regain some of the muscle loss from being ill. Since then, I have even completed the London Marathon and a number of half marathons.