

## LOUISE'S TB STORY: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND 'HYSTERIA'

“When I first got a chest infection, I wasn't really worried. I'd had them before, and I just figured it was part of being a smoker. But this time, the antibiotics my doctor prescribed didn't work.

Despite quitting smoking, I kept going back to my GP that year with strange symptoms: a cough that wouldn't go away, weight loss, night sweats, and this constant feeling of exhaustion and weakness. These were actually classic signs of TB, but my doctor kept giving me inhalers, more antibiotics, and painkillers. Nothing helped.

I became more introverted and isolated. Any exercise or movement left me exhausted, so I stayed at home when I wasn't at work. I was too tired to stand for even short periods of time, I remember. As an accountant, I could still do my job sitting at my desk, which was a small mercy. But looking back, I think I was in denial about how ill I actually was. I lost a lot of weight and was never hungry. Then I coughed up blood. I remember thinking I'd just cut my mouth.

“Looking back I was in denial...then I coughed up blood”

The following week, when I coughed up even more blood, I panicked. I went straight to A&E that evening. A chest X-ray showed "abnormal findings," and I was admitted to the hospital immediately. I spent two weeks in isolation before they finally gave me the diagnosis: TB.



They prescribed TB medication, and I was allowed to go home. Within just two or three weeks, I started to feel so much better. My strength started to increase day by day, I was allowed to return to work and my appetite returned with a vengeance.

After completing my treatment and being cured of TB, I learned that my lungs were scarred from how long the infection had gone on. I'll need careful monitoring in the future. My biggest challenge now is to maintain a healthy lifestyle so that my immune system can fight off any future infections and I can live a normal, active life. But my TB journey didn't end with my own recovery. Tests on my family, friends, and colleagues came back with many positive results, including my mother, father, and sister. They all had to go through treatment too.

Today, I'm in good health and feel positive about the future. However, the emotional impact of TB still runs deep. I guess TB still has a stigma attached to it, given other people's reactions. My consultant told me at the time of diagnosis that TB brings out 'the hysterical' in people and I now know that he was telling the truth!