

OUR HEALTH SOS

'I can't get married like this'

I'd never let my illness hold me back – but had it beaten me this time?

From Kelly Divers, 29, of Myrtle Road, Elland, West Yorkshire

My mum Carol appeared at my bedroom door and said: 'Are you ready, love?'

Every day she massaged my back and chest to loosen the mucus in my airways.

When I was two, I'd been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, a genetic disease that meant my internal organs became clogged, and I often had chest infections and inflammation of the lungs.

Doctors had told me I was healthy now, but that the condition could cause rapid health changes. Only half of sufferers reached their 40th birthday.

But I continued to live life to the full.

I had been backpacking, started university and fallen for a man called Karl.

Luckily he wasn't fazed by the pills I had to rely on every day.

Then I began to feel very unwell. I was treated for pneumonia, and I contracted MRSA

followed by swine flu. I was in hospital for days, and Karl remained by my side.

'Thank you,' I said.

'Don't be silly,' he replied. 'I'm always here for you.'

The infections took their toll and my lung function fell to 15 per cent, making me breathless and barely able to walk.

I needed a lung transplant, but the doctors told me I was too frail for surgery and should wait for my health to improve.

I was also told there was no guarantee the right match would be found.

I knew this was my last chance and wanted

nothing more than to have a future with Karl.

Mum became my full-time carer and I hated losing my independence.

But Karl cheered me up.

In the evenings he'd come to my hospital room and say: 'Fancy a drive?'

Popping out with him made me feel normal for a while.

Finally I was discharged from hospital, and Karl and I went on holiday to Spain with Mum and her partner Ray.

One evening, Karl said: 'Let's go for a drink along the boulevard.'

'We're all-inclusive,' I said. 'We may as well have a drink at the hotel.'

But Karl insisted, so we set off.

Minutes later he stopped and took a small box from

his pocket.
'Will you marry me?' he said.

'Yes!' I cried.

I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him, however long that was.

But back home, something troubled me.

I had always imagined gliding effortlessly down the aisle, not hobbling and panting for breath.

I said to Karl: 'I can't marry you like this.'

He looked crushed, then he said: 'OK, let's wait.'

Two years later my condition had improved enough for me to have a double lung transplant.

Karl kissed my hand before I went into theatre, and seven hours later I woke up

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

What is it? Cystic fibrosis is a genetic condition where the lungs and digestive system become clogged with mucus, making it hard to breathe and digest food.

Who gets it? Cystic fibrosis directly affects around 10,000 people in the UK.

The faulty gene is carried by more than two million people in the UK, most of whom have no idea they have it.

What's the treatment? There is no cure. The aim of treatment is to ease symptoms with medication and physiotherapy.

If the lungs become extensively damaged, a lung transplant may be needed.

Where can I find out more?

For more information, visit cysticfibrosis.org.uk or call the Cystic Fibrosis Trust helpline on 0300 373 1000.



Me in hospital



With Mum



Karl and me

AWARENESS

The cancers we FORGOT

We're used to talking about the most common types of cancer, but what about the rest?

When you hear the word cancer, does a particular type spring to mind? Lung, breast, prostate and bowel cancer are known as the 'big four', and together account for almost half of all cancer deaths. Major charities raise awareness of these conditions, driving support and donations.

But what if you're unlucky enough to have a type of cancer not many people have heard of, or even knew existed?

Those battling one of the big four have an array of charities and groups to turn to, as they rightly should. But it seems we've forgotten about those suffering certain forms of the disease, such as stomach, chest and tonsil cancer.

Consultant cancer specialist Dr Clive Peedell, co-leader of the National Health Action Party, says: 'Because rare cancers are just that — rare — there aren't as many clinical trials done, because we don't have the number of patients available.'

'Common cancers get more funding. For example, most people know someone affected by breast cancer so they are more likely to raise money for a related charity.'

'Rare cancers affect fewer people, which means fewer donations.'

Another problem is the research that goes into finding cures.

Dr Peedell says: 'If the pharmaceutical industry is going to produce a drug, they want it widely used to gain more profit.'

'A drug for a rare cancer will not



make as much money, so it becomes harder to get more funding for research.'

He adds: 'With head and neck cancer, people often assume it's self-inflicted by smoking when that is not always the case. This means it doesn't get

the same level of sympathy as, say, breast cancer.'

Peter Rhys-Evans is a cancer surgeon and executive chairman of the Oracle Cancer Trust, which funds new research into head and neck cancer.

He believes raising awareness for less well-known forms of cancer is key.

'It can be challenging when a cancer is not as prevalent as others,' he says.

'We need more support to raise funds for our research if we are to achieve greater survival rates for these patients.'

Edited by Julie Cook

● For more information, visit oraclecancertrust.org



'I couldn't find any support groups'

I lay in bed feeling sick and I had terrible abdominal pains again.

Twice my GP told me it was indigestion.

But weeks later, my skin turned yellow and itchy.

I booked in for a private scan, which showed a blockage in my pancreas. I

had a stent inserted.

After six weeks doctors still didn't know if the blockage was cancer, so I opted to have an operation called a Whipple procedure.

The head of my pancreas was removed, as well as part of my stomach, duodenum, small intestine, general bile duct and gallbladder.

Afterwards I got a diagnosis — cancer of the pancreatic bile duct.

I was shocked and scared, but when I looked for support groups, I couldn't find any.

Now I take medication

WHO KNEW?

Chatting to babies under the age of one could help them become better listeners and improve their ability to make friends

to learn what is safe and what is not.

Q I'M SCARED OF BEING UNDERWATER. I have had this fear since childhood and it's getting worse. I don't want to pass it on to my kids. What can I do?

A The best way not to pass fears on to your children is to conquer them yourself. This can be difficult, but it may be worth asking your GP to refer you to a psychologist.

In the meantime, try hard not to let your children see that you are scared, as they naturally look to you

Q WILL TALC HARM MY BABY? A friend said I shouldn't use talcum powder on my baby, but my mum says this is nonsense and that she used it on me when I was a child. Who should I listen to?

A Talcum powder can be dangerous to small babies if they accidentally breathe it in. Some research also suggests regular talc use is related to ovarian

cancer, but not all scientists agree. Although the risks are slight, many doctors advise against using it on babies.

Q MY LIPS ARE SORE. They also have a dark line around them. I have had surgery for short bowel syndrome and was told that the problem was due to Vitamin B

deficiency. But I have been taking supplements and it hasn't got better. What can I do?

A When your lips are inflamed they often become darker around the edges. This can be caused by lack of vitamin B6, lots of sun or wind exposure, allergies to make-up, or as a side effect from lots of different medications. If vitamin tablets don't help, ask your doctor to look for another cause.

Q I HAVE NO LIBIDO. After having both ovaries removed, I've noticed I have no sex drive. I feel guilty that I no longer have a loving relationship with my husband. Can you help?

A The ovaries produce oestrogen and when levels are low, libido is often reduced. Many women also experience vaginal dryness after menopause or ovary removal, which can make sex uncomfortable.

Hormone replacement — as a tablet, cream or pessary — can be very helpful. Your GP should be able to help. If not, you may be referred to a menopause clinic.

● Dr Helen cannot answer your questions personally. If your symptoms are urgent or painful, please see a doctor.



'I felt no one knew anything about my cancer'

It was my 50th birthday and I should have been celebrating.

Instead I was sitting with a doctor who told me: 'You have tonsil cancer.'

'What's that?' I said.

Five months earlier, I'd found a lump in my neck. I'd been passed around several specialists and told it was nothing.

I had pushed for a biopsy and finally I had a diagnosis.

The doctor explained that I had a cancerous tumour in my mouth that had spread to some of my lymph nodes.

I had an operation called a partial neck dissection to remove the lymph nodes



Suzie

from my neck, followed by radiotherapy.

Now I'm doing well but I've realised how little is known about cancers of the head and neck. It can be easy to forget the many people suffering from cancers others have never heard about.

These diseases need to be talked about more, not just to help charities get donations, but so that doctors can spot the signs early.

From Suzie Cooke, 56, of Battersea, London

HOW TO... Beat insomnia

WIND DOWN

Try having a bath to relax or listening to gentle music. Remove electrical devices from the bedroom and avoid watching TV once you're in bed.

MAKE IT RESTFUL

Your bedroom should be as quiet and dark as possible, and not too hot or cold. Adjust the environment to suit you.

EXERCISE

Moderate exercise can help relieve stress, but don't do it too close to bedtime or it could keep you awake.

**LESS CAFFEINE**

Cut down on tea, coffee and caffeinated fizzy drinks — they prevent deep sleep. Have herbal tea, water or milk instead.

DON'T STRESS

Try not to lie awake worrying about anything. Jot it down so you can deal with it the next day. Or get up and do something to distract your mind.

CREATE A ROUTINE

Go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day. It will help to programme your body better.

AVOID NAPS

Try not to nod off in the day. It can stop you from sleeping well later on.

KEEP A DIARY

Make a note of your sleeping habits including when you fall asleep and wake up, anything you eat and drink before bed and any stressful events from your day.

● If you're still having trouble sleeping, ask your GP for help.

Ask Dr HELEN

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Shop spy



The average 'clean looking' pair of hands can hold up to a shocking 10 million germs. But now scientists have developed ecohydra, an innovative hand sanitiser that quickly kills up to 99.9999% of germs. It has proved so effective that it has been approved by the NHS. The foam is also alcohol-free, and it contains aloe vera to keep skin moisturised and supple. Available from Boots, priced £2.49.

Click on it...

Many of us enjoy the buzz we get from caffeine. Consumed in moderation, it can make us feel more alert and energetic. But how much is too much? A daily intake of up to 400mg, equal to about four mugs of instant coffee, is said to be safe for healthy adults. Pregnant women should have no more than 200mg. Try Coca Cola's caffeine counter at coca-cola.co.uk/health to work out how much you consume.

