

Plain text version of our From Me and My Friends to You and Yours resources on Ulcerative Colitis

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What is Ulcerative Colitis?

Sounds like: Ul-ser-ah-tiv col-eye-tiss

Ulcerative Colitis (UC) is a condition where parts of the digestive system become inflamed, creating ulcers that can bleed. This can cause tummy pain, blood or mucus in stool (poo), diarrhoea (needing to go to the toilet to pass stool lots), constipation (finding it hard to pass stool), and fatigue (feeling tired all the time).

UC affects the last parts of the digestive system called the large intestine (also known as the colon) and the rectum. The digestive system (also called guts or bowels) is a long tube in your body that allows you to eat food and remove waste from your body.

UC is a chronic and relapsing condition. This means that people with UC have periods where they feel well and periods where their UC 'flares up' and they become unwell. There is currently no cure for UC; although some people can go years without experiencing a flare.

The cause of UC is unknown and people can develop UC at any point in their life with many people having their first flare at a young age.

Many people with UC take regular medication, such as tablets or injections. Some people might need to go to the hospital to take their medication or have regular check-ups. Medications can make people feel sick and tired which can make them miss

school or hanging out with friends. Sometimes people will stay overnight in a hospital if they get sick.

How does Ulcerative Colitis affect...

Me physically?

One of my main physical symptoms is tummy pain. The level of pain depends on whether my UC is flaring or not. This means I can go weeks without pain but can have periods where my tummy is very sore. This can make it hard to go to school or university or meet up with my friends. Walking and exercise can make the pain worse, so it can be difficult to get around if my UC is flaring.

If my UC is flaring, I can need to go to the toilet often and with little warning. This means I like to be near a toilet if my UC is flaring. This can make going out with friends difficult, especially if we are far from public toilets. It can also mean missing out on teaching if I have to leave during class.

My UC can make me very fatigued (tired) meaning I can find it hard to go to school or university, exercise, and concentrate. I find sleeping more and napping when I can helps, along with breaking up activities into small chunks to complete throughout the day with breaks in between.

Me mentally?

When my UC is not flaring I enjoy going to university, meeting up with friends, and exercising. However, this is not always possible when I am unwell. I find it frustrating when my body does not work properly and I have to miss out on seeing friends or doing

things I enjoy. Being stuck in the house for a long time can make me feel sad and lonely.

Missing school or university makes me worried as I feel like I'm falling behind and can't do as well as I would like.

My Life?

I've learnt to live with unpredictability...

My UC can flare at any time, often with little warning, and it can take months to feel better again. This means I might have to postpone or cancel plans that I organised long in advance. It can be hard to set specific goals e.g. wanting to do well in school or university, or run a 10k, as my UC often gets in the way of achieving what I want to. This can be particularly upsetting when hearing friends talk about future plans, such as holidays, that I might not be healthy enough to attend.

I sometimes have to miss things out..

Pacing activities is often a big part of having a disability or chronic illness. This means I can't do everything and often have to choose between activities, e.g. going out with friends on Friday means I will be too tired/sore to go out with friends on Saturday.

How you can help!

UC can mean people have to miss school. Offering to help them catch up by telling them about the schoolwork can be very helpful!

Understand if someone with UC might not be able to hang out sometimes and try to organise activities for when they feel better. It might be helpful to organise activities in their house, where they feel more comfortable and have easier access to a toilet.

Talk! Having UC can be stressful, scary, and sad, especially if it's flaring for the first time. Offering to listen to your friend if they ever wanted to talk can be a really good way to show support. Even if you can't give advice, listening goes a long way to make someone feel less alone.

Resources to find out more

If you would like to find out more about Ulcerative Colitis, here are some other resources that are designed for young people...

<https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/support/support-for-families/young-person-films>

Young Person Films created by Crohn's and Colitis UK, documenting young people's experiences with education, relationships, healthcare, and telling other people while living with Crohn's or Colitis.

In My Shoes: 24 Hours with Crohn's or Colitis App is an app created by Crohn's and Colitis UK that helps people experience what it is like to have Crohn's or Colitis! Download from the App store or Google Play.

About the author..

Laura (she/her) ... is 20 and is living in Glasgow. She enjoys long walks and looking after all her (many) houseplants.

Get involved!

We would love to get as many people involved in creating these resources as possible! If you are a young person living with a chronic illness, disability, or long term health condition, and would be interested in making a similar resource based on YOUR experiences, we would love to hear from you! You can email us at thelunaproject@gmail.com or find us on social media [@thelunaprojectuk](https://www.instagram.com/thelunaprojectuk).