

JUST THE START

Jessica Heather, 30, from Hertfordshire, fell ill during her honeymoon and then never got better...

Boarding the plane to Olu Deniz, Turkey, with my husband Wayne, then 27, I couldn't have been more excited to jet off on our honeymoon together.

It was summer 2014 and we had just tied the knot.

'It's going to be a trip to remember!' I smiled.

Wayne and I had been together for over two years.

Our wedding had been a massive celebration, and we had wed in the same church as Wayne's parents.

Our favourite thing to do together was travel the world.

Trying local cuisines, sightseeing and exploring.

This holiday was going to be the best one yet – our first trip as man and wife.

Only, it wasn't quite smooth sailing...

On the second day, we had a delicious Turkish meal at a local restaurant, then both fell ill with food poisoning.

'I don't feel too good,' I said to Wayne, at the hotel.

The food was lovely – it was just too rich for our stomachs.

We spent the next few days in the hotel room.

Wayne recovered fully, but I still had an upset stomach.

Determined to still make it the best trip ever, we stuck to our honeymoon plans.

Visiting a mud bath and going on a jeep safari, we had an amazing time.

When we travelled back to the UK, I knew something still wasn't right with my body.

My stomach was in agony and I had bowel problems.

I had been diagnosed with

endometriosis in my teens, but my symptoms were unrelated.

'I need to go to the hospital,' I told Wayne, in agony.

I was kept in hospital for 10 days and treated for severe food poisoning.

Then when I returned home, more problems emerged.

It was one thing after the other – I suffered fatigue, joint pain, memory loss and severe headaches, while Wayne was back to normal.

At the time, I was working in healthcare, but I had to keep calling in sick.

I was forgetting people's names, and even how to talk.

What's wrong with me? I thought.

How did this all start with food poisoning?

I was in and out of hospital, and a doctor diagnosed me with fibromyalgia – a

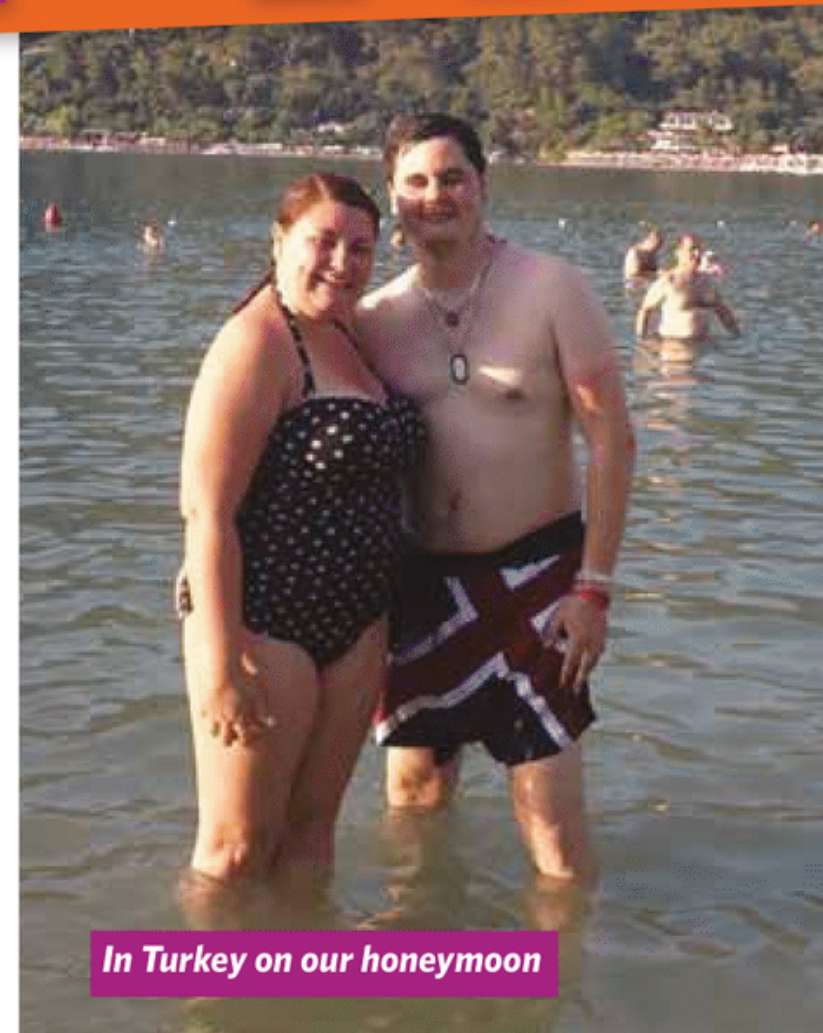
condition that causes pain across the body.

Only, it didn't explain the rest of my symptoms.

It was supposed to be the start of our married life but it was a disaster.

Over the following few years, I was diagnosed with different conditions and syndromes by

Newlyweds



In Turkey on our honeymoon

numerous physicians, brain doctors and cardiologists.

I struggled to cope with the physical side effects and it caused a strain on my mental health, too.

In January 2017, my anxiety got really bad and I had a severe anxiety attack at work.

I hit rock bottom.

'We'll get through this together,' Wayne promised.

I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, and it was a mutual decision that I should leave work to prioritise my health.

At home, I continued to develop new symptoms.

Mouth ulcers, skin lesions and lots of blackouts.

'I'm going to try you on a new medication,' my doctor said.

Still wanting to do what we loved most, Wayne and I booked a trip back to Olu Deniz, Turkey.

It was so lovely being back. A bittersweet reminder of where my body had changed.

In early 2019, I was referred to the London Centre of Excellence in Royal London Hospital to see specialist medical professionals.

They tested to see if I had

Behcet's syndrome – a rare and poorly understood condition that results in inflammation of the blood vessels and tissues.

Symptoms include mouth ulcers, skin lesions, painful joints, headaches, and abdominal pain.

I ticked all the boxes.

'I believe you have a mild form of the disorder,' a rheumatologist told me.

'How did this all come from food poisoning?' I asked.

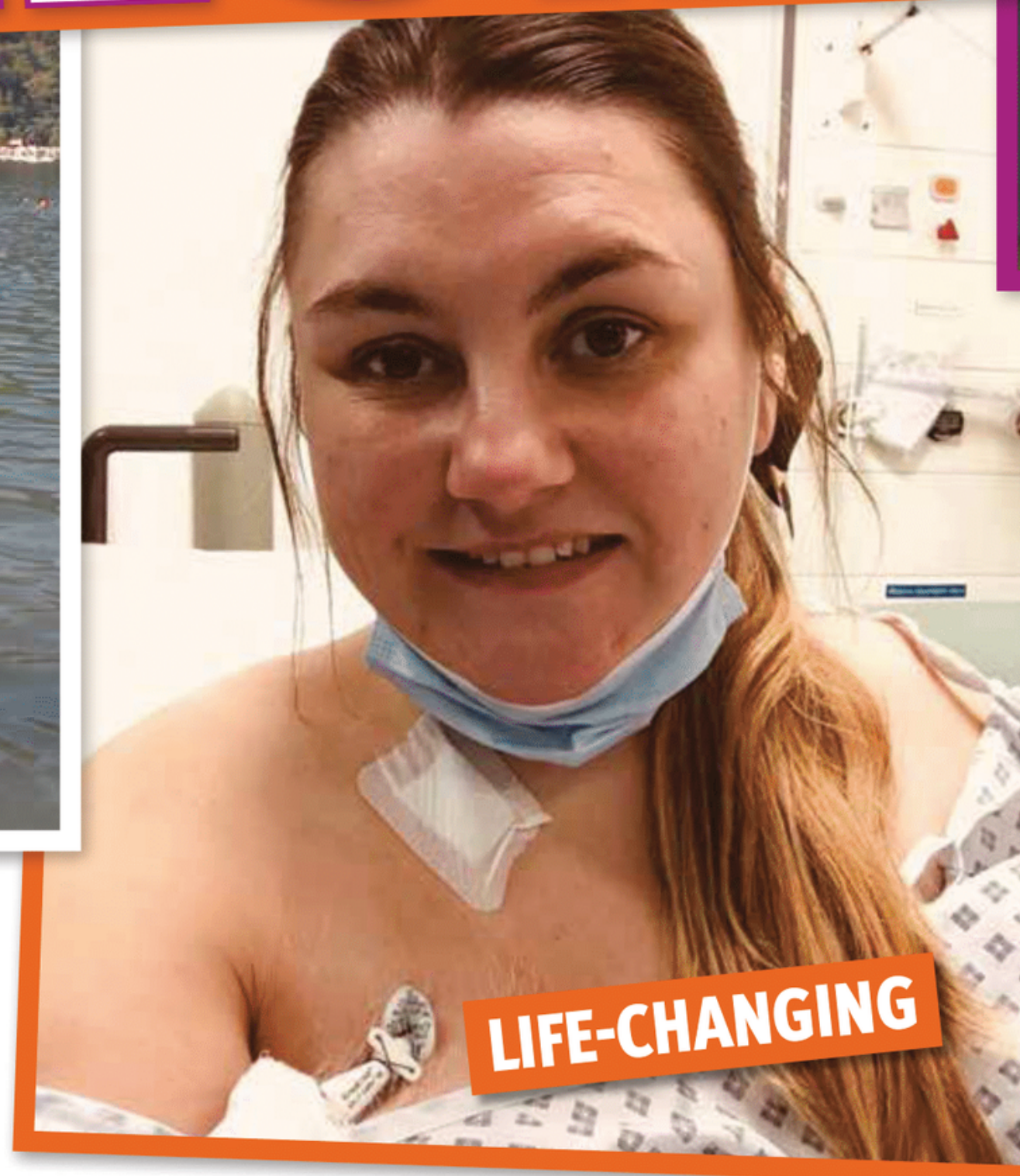
They believed it could have all stemmed from bacterial factors, but couldn't explain how my body never recovered.

Still, it was a relief to finally have the right diagnosis.

'It's taken six years!' I cried to Wayne.

I was put on medication, and faced a difficult future with a life-changing syndrome.

In March 2020, Wayne and I spoke about starting a



LIFE-CHANGING

YouTube channel.

'Why don't we show our travels off to the world?' I said.

We started creating videos of previous holidays in Italy, San Francisco, Croatia and Miami and uploaded them to our new YouTube channel 'Holiday With The Heathers'.

And when Covid-19 regulations were enforced, we decided to explore the UK.

'Let's show everyone what you can do in the UK – with a disability,' Wayne said.

We took a trip to Thorpe Park and vlogged everything.

Our family and friends loved it, and even strangers, too.

Then in June 2020, my symptoms worsened.

I had hot flushes, severe joint pain and I was vomiting often.

I was taken for a CT scan in

hospital, and the doctor diagnosed me with a second condition – gastroparesis.

Gastroparesis is a rare condition that affects the normal movement of the muscles in your stomach.

It meant that my stomach was practically paralysed, and it couldn't digest food properly.

I was sent home on a low fibre diet.

Drinking soup, I thought of all the incredible cuisines Wayne and I had tried over the years, and longed to be trying new foods, travelling the world.

Now, Wayne was my registered carer.

Then one day...

'I need to go to hospital,' I told Wayne, vomiting blood.

'It's a good job you came,' the doctor said. 'You are severely

malnourished.'

I spent the next six weeks in hospital alone, and my only contact with Wayne was over video calls.

But we had each other, and we had to stay positive.

'Why don't we both vlog our days?' Wayne suggested.

I started filming my time in hospital, and sent him the footage for YouTube.

It gave me something to focus on each day, and had a really positive impact on my mental health.

When doctors suggested I try a plasma exchange, I filmed that experience, too.

On the first day, they trialled substitute plasma and it went really well.

Then on the second day, they tried real donated plasma, and I began to show up in a rash.

'I can't breathe,' I croaked, as my throat began to close up.

'She's having an anaphylactic shock,' I heard the medical team say, as I drifted out of consciousness.

I remember saying: 'Please don't let me die.'

I truly thought it was the end.

'We're going to give you a shot of adrenaline now, Jess,' the nurse explained.

Thankfully, I came around.

'You had us worried,' the doctor said, explaining how my body had an allergic reaction.

'We'll continue to try substitute plasma,' he said.

After a few days, I was able to eat and walk again.

Spooning a tiny portion of mash and gravy into my mouth, I felt victorious.

'I'm getting better each day,' I told my YouTube subscribers.

In October, I had a dialysis catheter fitted on my chest.

Then I was released home and reunited with Wayne.

Now, I am on a six-weekly

rota of Albumin plasma.

I am in a lot of pain, and I can't do things that I love.

I can eat and walk, although one day I might need an NG tube and a wheelchair.

My life has changed forever, but I try to remain positive.

I can't believe this started on my honeymoon, but I am just grateful to be here with Wayne.

We have continued to film our lives for YouTube.

I want to help as many people as I can that could have – or have been diagnosed with – Behcet's syndrome.

I advise everyone to reach out to charities and push for referrals for specialist care.

Behcet's UK and Guts UK have both been amazing!

Wayne and I recently started our own health awareness campaign to give recognition to rare conditions, invisible illnesses and disabilities.

I can't wait until the day Wayne and I can continue our travels around the world.

There are so many adventures waiting to be had.

● **Find Jessica and Wayne's awareness campaign at www.hwthhealthawarenesscampaign.com and follow their YouTube 'Holiday With The Heathers'**

Guts UK

Guts UK charity is the charity for the digestive system. They fund research, provide expert information & raise awareness of digestive health. With new knowledge, Guts UK will end the pain & suffering for the millions affected by digestive diseases. Go to gutscharity.org.uk to learn more.