# Twins' parallel lives take a tragic turn as one battles colon cancer



Brinlee Luster and her twin sister Mariela, both hailing from Utah, have led remarkably parallel lives, exhibiting similar academic pursuits and even facing significant life milestones together, such as their weddings, which occurred just months apart. However, their shared journey took a dramatic and distressing turn in 2023 when Brinlee began to experience severe abdominal cramping and debilitating fatigue.

Initially, Brinlee attributed these symptoms to the pressures associated with wedding planning. However, as her condition worsened, she sought medical evaluation. Initially, health professionals dismissed her concerns, attributing her symptoms to anxiety, irritable bowel syndrome, or side effects from birth control. Eventually, after enduring persistent symptoms, Brinlee underwent a colonoscopy that revealed a diagnosis of stage four colon cancer—a shocking finding for someone just 21 years old.

Speaking to KSL News about the moment she received her diagnosis, Brinlee expressed the emotional toll it took on her, stating, "I don't think anything can prepare you for that moment when you're told you have cancer." She noted that the diagnosis forced her to slow down at a time when her life was taking an upward trajectory, making her feel isolated as she watched her peers advance in their lives.

Mariela, who has remained in good health and recently underwent a colonoscopy that showed the presence of polyps, conveyed her own feelings of helplessness, remarking, "Having [Brinlee] go through something that I couldn't go through, and I couldn't experience, was just so hard." Reflecting on Brinlee's condition, she indicated that Brinlee's situation "really did save my life in a way because I was headed down that route."

Current research indicates a worrying trend of increasing colorectal cancer diagnoses among young adults in the United States. Factors such as sedentary lifestyles, diet, alcohol consumption, and obesity have been suggested as possible contributors to this rise. In the context of the twins' experience, experts are left questioning why only Brinlee received a cancer diagnosis despite their similar lifestyles.

Dr Mark Lewis, Brinlee's oncologist at Intermountain Health, highlighted the troubling reality that there is "unfortunately no such thing as too young for colon cancer." He raised concerns about the long-term implications of antibiotic use, explaining that antibiotics taken during childhood and adulthood can disrupt the bacterial environment of the colon, potentially leading to heightened cancer risk. He emphasised the importance of cautious antibiotic prescription among younger populations.

A 2022 study conducted by researchers from the University of Aberdeen, NHS Grampian, and Queen's University Belfast found a correlation between antibiotic use and the risk of developing colon cancer, particularly in individuals under 50. The study, which assessed nearly 40,000 people, noted a 50% increased risk of colon cancer among younger adults who had used antibiotics, while the risk for those over 50 was approximately 9% higher.

Sarah Perrott, co-first author of the study from the University of Aberdeen, pointed out that while antibiotic use is common, it is crucial to use them judiciously. "Not everyone who uses antibiotics will get bowel cancer," she stated, underscoring the importance of prescription prudence.

Given that both Brinlee and Mariela have shared similar lifestyles, researchers speculate that their differing experiences with antibiotics since childhood could play a significant role in Brinlee's unfortunate diagnosis. Since her diagnosis, Brinlee has completed 30 rounds of chemotherapy and concluded her treatment in December, emerging cancer-free.

In response to their experience, the twins have embarked on a mission to raise awareness about colon cancer and its risks. They have launched ‘The Port Studio,’ which offers jumpers designed to help facilitate easy IV access for individuals undergoing chemotherapy.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ladbible.com/news/brinlee-mariela-luster-twins-diagnosed-colon-cancer-antibiotics-711488-20250325> - This article supports the story of Brinlee and Mariela Luster, twin sisters from Utah, with Brinlee diagnosed with stage four colon cancer at the age of 21. It highlights Dr. Mark Lewis’s comments on antibiotics' potential role in increasing colon cancer risk.
* <https://www.ksl.com/article/51280522/colon-cancer-in-young-adults-utahn-shares-experience-being-diagnosed-at-21> - This article discusses Brinlee’s experience with colon cancer at a young age and her sister Mariela’s reflection on her own colonoscopy findings, which revealed polyps. It also quotes Dr. Mark Lewis concerning the rising trend of colon cancer in young adults.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOlJ74WCxBI> - This YouTube video shares Brinlee Luster’s story and her diagnosis with colon cancer at a young age. It discusses the trend of rising colon cancer diagnoses in young adults and highlights screenings and symptoms.
* <https://www.cancer.org/research/cancer-facts-statistics/all-cancer-facts-figures/cancer-facts-figures-2022.html> - The American Cancer Society’s Cancer Facts & Figures report provides data on colorectal cancer trends, including the increase in diagnoses among younger populations. It supports the statement about a 9% increase in colon cancer diagnoses in people under 50 since 2020.
* <https://www.bmj.com/content/378/bmj-2021-068413> - This article discusses the potential health impacts of antibiotic use, which aligns with Dr. Mark Lewis’s concerns about antibiotics and colon cancer risk. However, specific studies connecting antibiotics to colon cancer may vary, and it is important to consult recent research.