# Caroline Etheridge shares her journey living with inflammatory bowel disease



Caroline Etheridge, a 31-year-old woman from Cornwall, has shared her experiences of navigating life with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), specifically colitis, which impacts around half a million people in the UK. Etheridge's condition entails not only frequent restroom visits—up to twenty times a day—but also includes symptoms such as severe stomach pain, bleeding, fatigue, and mouth ulcers. Despite the severity of her symptoms, Etheridge faced years of misdiagnosis and was frequently dismissed by healthcare professionals.

Reflecting on her journey, Etheridge stated, “I’ve had symptoms of IBD since I was five years old and it was mild, but the older I got, the worse it got.” By her teenage years, her symptoms escalated dramatically—leading to significant challenges in daily life, including an inability to maintain regular work hours and increased anxiety about leaving her home. She explained, “I found living daily life really hard... I was scared to leave the house in case I had accidents.”

Etheridge’s struggles were exacerbated by the initial dismissive attitudes of her doctors, who attributed her symptoms to anxiety or inconclusive diagnoses. It was not until January 2020, after persistent symptoms and a family history of Crohn’s and colitis were discussed, that she received a proper diagnosis of IBD at the age of 26. “I was so relieved,” Etheridge remarked, having endured years of uncertainty and questioning her own mental stability, as many healthcare providers had told her she only had IBS.

Following her diagnosis, Etheridge began a rigorous treatment regime, including steroids and consultations with a nutritionist and an IBD nursing team. She has since been undergoing infusions and injections and notes, “I have started to have some good days so I’m more hopeful for the future.” Nevertheless, she still grapples with daily challenges that affect various aspects of her life, including her job as a course advisor, which she currently maintains at three days per week due to her condition.

Dating, too, presents its unique set of challenges. Etheridge has realised the importance of transparency about her illness when meeting new people. “I now am very upfront when I am dating a guy... I would much rather be upfront straight away and see how they act,” she explained. This approach has become integral as she encounters episodes of pain or illness, highlighting the support she requires from potential partners.

She recounted a recent experience while on a date, explaining how she had to manage a sudden onset of symptoms at her partner's home. “I ran to his loo and was in there for a while. He had an older style toilet flush, and I just couldn’t flush it. So I had to put the lid down and ask him to flush it for me,” Etheridge said, adding that humour sometimes helps in easing the tension during such moments.

For Etheridge, raising awareness about IBD remains a crucial goal. “It affects every part of my body and my life,” she noted, underscoring the unpredictability of daily life with the condition. “I wake up each day with no idea how I am going to feel or how bad it will be today.” Through sharing her story, she aims to shed light on the realities faced by those living with IBD and encourage a broader understanding of the condition, which often goes unrecognised.

The need for awareness is critical, as Etheridge pointed out that many individuals may be living with IBD undiagnosed. Educating the public about the symptoms and challenges associated with the illness can foster understanding and compassion, permitting those affected to seek help sooner.

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

## References

* <https://www.instagram.com/carolineeetheridge/p/DIKCk8IMCkH/> - This URL provides Caroline Etheridge's personal account of living with IBD, corroborating her struggles with diagnosis and managing the condition.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/inflammatory-bowel-disease/> - This URL supports the information about IBD symptoms and management, aligning with Etheridge's experiences and treatment regimen.
* <https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/about-inflammatory-bowel-disease> - This website covers the prevalence of IBD in the UK, its impact on daily life, and the challenges faced by those affected, echoing Etheridge's story.
* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/20506406211034450> - This article discusses the psychological impact of IBD on individuals, highlighting the importance of early diagnosis and understanding, which aligns with Etheridge's experiences.
* <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/5/e033445> - This study explores delays in IBD diagnosis and its effects on patients, mirroring Etheridge's delays and the psychological toll she faced.