

Cambridge News

Living

Helping you make the most of life



THIS WEEK

Style p26

Some day, my prints will come . . .

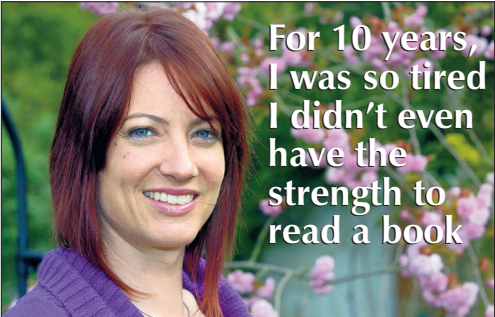
Food p24

Fly the flag with a great British feast

plus

Great savings in our exclusive wine club

April 24, 2010



For 10 years, I was so tired I didn't even have the strength to read a book

How Mel reclaimed her life after decade-long battle with ME

TO look at Mel Abbott today, bursting with energy and living life to the full, it's hard to believe that just a few years ago, she barely had the energy to get out of bed.

Originally from Auckland, New Zealand, the 32-year-old developed ME after falling from her home when she was 18.

"For the last three months after the fall, I had no short-term memory," explains Mel, who now lives in Hindwick. "After six months my head injury had cleared up and my memory came back, but the fatigue just got so much worse."

Diagnosed with ME, Mel's life changed dramatically as the illness, which affects 250,000 people in the

Real Life

By Louise Martin



UK 25,000 of them children under 16), took hold. Recognised as a neurological illness by the World Health Organisation, ME (Myalgic Encephalopathy) is also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and can affect people of all ages.

The symptoms vary from person to person and can be life-changing: debilitating fatigue, painful muscles and joints, reduced muscle tone, disordered sleep, gastric disturbances,

poor memory and low concentration. In most cases the illness is linked to a viral infection such as glandular fever, but other factors such as an operation – or, as in Mel's case, an accident – can trigger the illness.

"I went from being the super-motivated young teen who did well in school, went to uni and had a great social life to living on the sofa all day; I was completely cut off from life," says Mel.

In total, Mel suffered from the condition – which, at its worst, left her housebound – for a little over 10 years.

"There were patches, probably of about a four-year period, when I hardly did anything at all," says Mel. "It was absolute hell. ME was like having jet lag, a hangover and flu all the time. I had horrendous pain in

my body, it ached so much, and my limbs felt so heavy that even lifting a cup of tea was hard work.

"To walk up the stairs I had to drag myself up by the hand rail because my legs weren't strong enough. When I wanted to sit down, I would start to lower myself down and then my muscles just couldn't hold my weight and I'd keep down instantly."

"When her ME was at its worst, a typical day for Mel would be to get up at 8am, lie in bed for an hour or so, take a shower and have breakfast, which would take her 15 mins. She would then lie on the couch and listen to a talking book – she didn't even have the energy to read.

Mel adds: "My mum gave me so much support. Sometimes she would drive me to the beach – it was only a five-minute walk but I couldn't have

imagined making that short journey. Then I'd go home, eat lunch and go back to bed until 6pm. Then I would get up and have my dinner, watch TV and be back in bed by 9.30pm – that was my life.

"I had afternoon sleeps every day from 3-4pm for 10 years; I just couldn't make it through the day without one. I was sleeping for about nine hours at night so I was awake for 12 hours a day – when I say awake I wasn't that awake, it was lying on the couch in a sort of 'suggle zone'."

Focused to give up her degree in biology because of her ME, Mel, as the condition progressed, began to feel more and more isolated and turned to counselling to come to terms with the illness.

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