

I'm Helena and I'm a Medical English teacher and Registered Nurse in the UK.

I interview English speakers about their health to help you become more familiar with the language used to talk about different medical topics.

My aim is to build your confidence in interactions with your English-speaking patients and healthcare colleagues.

Welcome to English Practice for Healthcare.

I have asked people to speak slower than usual but the best thing about this podcast is the real language you will hear.

Depending on your English level it could be helpful to read whilst you listen and transcripts for each episode can be found on my website [www.englishpracticeforhealthcare.com](http://www.englishpracticeforhealthcare.com).

The language is probably most suitable for intermediate English learners and above, however a challenge is always good so whatever your level, I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to hear these natural conversations about personal health experiences. Ok, let's get started!

This third episode is based on the experience of Vicky. Vicky is a 37-year-old female who has Crohn's disease. The time when I was putting this episode together, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of December happened to be Crohn's and Colitis awareness week. The campaign this year wanted to draw attention to the fact that it can be difficult for people with Crohn's or Ulcerative Colitis to find the right words and language to talk about their condition. For example, describing their symptoms and the different ways it impacts on their lives. This includes with their family and friends, their employees and also with healthcare professionals. In the first half of the episode, you can develop your listening skills by answering the questions:

What experience is Vicky talking about with me?

And secondly, Vicky will describe one of her treatments. Was it a success or not?

Which means, did the treatment work? Was it effective for Vicky?

Two pieces of vocabulary to listen out for, Vicky refers to some people with her condition having 'the bag', here she is referring to a colostomy bag, which is also referred to as a stoma bag.

And she uses the word 'tummy'. This is just another word we use to describe the stomach area in English. It's a patient friendly term, which can be used in informal interactions.

Ok, so good afternoon, Vicky, are you, you alright?

Hiya, yeah, I'm good thankyou

Good

How are you?

I'm fine thankyou

Good

Uh I, can I call you Vicky? What do you like to be called?

Yeah you can call me Vicky, at work I'm a Victoria cos that's more serious

(laughing)

But I'm OK to call you Vicky?

Yes, that'd be nice, thank you

Lovely, so where are you from?

I'm from Sheffield but I've lived in London since 2010

Oh gosh that's a long stint

Yeah, really long time

Mm mm so do you feel you've got an accent?

Um I think people in London would think I had a soft Northern accent

Mm mm

Because I say 'bath' instead of 'bath' and 'path' instead of 'path'

Mmm mm

But I don't feel like I have an accent

No I don't think you have too strong an accent either um so could you tell me a little bit about your lifestyle, what's a normal week or a normal day look like for you?

Well I work full time um and that's a desk job um and we're hybrid so sometimes I go into the office sometimes I work from home um but I prefer going to the office at this time of year cos I don't have to pay for my heating

(laughs)

Wise

Yeah uh and then in the evenings um I like to see friends I like to go to the gym do running go to exercise classes go out for dinner and drinks and yeah

What's your favourite type of food?

Good question at the moment I have been going for a lot of Mexican meals

Ahh ok

Umm but I like oh I do like a good pasta a nice creamy pasta but that's the good thing about London is you can find every cuisine so

Yeah cos that's another one of your passions yeah cos you mentioned Italian food, Mexican food, is travel

Mmmm yeah I do like to go on holiday (laugh) get some sun um so yeah exploring Europe um going to Spain going to Italy, going skiing

Nice

Just to get away

And that's the good thing about living in London too your near the airport

Mm mm so quite active holidays as well when you go you might be skiing or

Sometimes its nice just to be on the beach with a book

Yeah yeah um but in May 2022 you were diagnosed with Crohn's disease um so can you um talk me through that what led up to that diagnosis

Yeah sure so um in about November 2021 I sort of was feeling quite bloated and was having to go to the toilet a lot and if I look back at pictures, I was actually on holiday at that time and if I look back at the pictures I can see that my tummy's quite big

Oh right

But at the time I just thought well your on holiday your eating a lot you know your in a different surroundings and then it was Christmas and I was still kind of like having to go to the toilet a lot, up in the night to go to the toilet

Mm mm

Um and then but thenmyou think well its Christmas your eating a lot you know

Mm mm

And then it got to January and it didn't settle down um so I, so I thought maybe this isn't quite right, um so I went to the GP and I was having a bit of blood as well when I was going to the toilet

Oh gosh

But again, you think well maybe its haemorrhoids maybe its you know

Ok

You know you think am I stressed? Um so went to the GP who prescribed some tests um like a, some blood tests and a faecal calprotectin test

Yep

Which is where they test your poo and those came back with signs of inflammation

Ok

Um and the GP said you probably need a colonoscopy

Oh gosh

Yeah to see what that actually is uh so referred me for that um

How did you feel before that?

I

When you went on the day before that procedure

Um a bit nervous um cos you have to do all the prep um

Mmm yeah

So by the time you get there you've been like nil by mouth and you sort of don't feel your best but to be honest I was just, I was just kind of glad that it hadn't all been in my mind, I just thought maybe you know maybe you'll just have IBS or have a gluten intolerance or maybe your stressed and you've kind of brought it on yourself so I was just kind of relieved to know that it was actually something that was wrong

Oh that's interesting

Yeah

And before you went to that did they did the GP say we're looking for this, we think it might be this or was it just we don't know were you

Uh when they when the GP said it looks like its some sort of inflammation I think they said so it will either be Crohn's or Ulcerative colitis

Right

Um so and then as soon like when you go for the colonoscopy your awake or I was awake and as soon as they went in they were like oh yep its inflamed so they knew that it was definitely one of those things and then it was pretty straightforward for them to tell what it was

Right so what happened from there then? So you actually fortunately got that diagnosis quite quickly

Yeah so I got the official diagnosis in May and then um got started on some drugs

Mm mm

Um and then we just sort of were trying different drugs to see if they would work

Yeah

Um to sort of ladder down that's how they described it um but nothing was really working I was on steroids, which weren't really working

Mmm

And then eventually they decided to try me on um a diet that was just these drinks

Right

For six weeks where all you would drink is these drinks and it just try and give your bowel a rest

Gosh

And hopefully put you into remission

OK, ok umm so how long was that sorry from being diagnosed to being put on that a liquid only diet

Yeah that was in October so this time last year

Ok and how had you felt like how can you just tell me a bit about when they told you about Crohn's what sort of feelings did you go through, what a, for example, how much did you know about it had you ever heard of Crohn's before?

I'd kind of heard of it in passing but I didn't really know what it involved and then when you start googling it you realise there are people who are very unwell and have like the bag

Mmm

And have had to have lots of surgeries and you know or have to be fed a different way so and because its incurable

Right

I was a bit worried that um I would just get more and more and more ill um and there's just kind of never a never an end date that's just it now for the rest of your life and I think that was a bit difficult to get your head around

Yeah

And to to say well this is part of who I am now

Yeah

You sort of you have to think of yourself in a different way like oh right I'm an ill person now

Mmmm

So that was a bit strange

Yeah yeah so it affected like your identity

Yeah my identity, like my self esteem

Yeah

Um and I just felt like I wouldn't be able, I think I felt like I wouldn't be able to live a normal life again

Yeah

Um and cos things were always changing you know I was at one point I was on loads of different tablets a day and you know going for lots of appointments, loads of blood tests and then you know you feel like well I can't go on holiday now

Yeah

Um and everything's quite uncertain

Yeah

So

And that's a big thing about health when it affects yeah the things you like to do and it yeah it stops you doing the things you enjoy, which is the things that make us feel like ourselves isn't it

Yeah, yeah

Um so what was it like being on that diet then?

It wasn't very good (laughs)

Um it was really difficult because so yeah you just get these pallets of these drinks basically from the pharmacist um and then that's all you can have you can have clear liquids as well like squash or black tea or coffee

Yeah

Um and then you just have to carry round these drinks with you so if you're going to the office

Right

Just take a couple of drinks in your bag and their like chocolate flavour or vanilla or fruits of the forest and then when everyone else is having their lunch at work your just having a drink so its quite

difficult and then you realise how much of your socialising is all eating and drinking especially in the run up to Christmas

Yeah

Um so that's difficult you can't really go out to a restaurant with friends you can't really you can go to the pub but all you can have is a soda and lime and

Mmm so you couldn't drink any alcohol

No and I feel like it's alright when you're at home but when you're out everyone just feels so sorry for you

Mmmm

So it's quite you don't wanna make other people feel uncomfortable and also it makes you realise you're unwell because eating and drinking is such a normal part of the day and when that and when all you've got is these drinks and you can't even look forward to it

Mmmm

Your like oh right I am really unwell now cos I can't even eat food like that's a bit shocking

Mm mm

Um

So were there any side effects from I mean uh from being on that diet or did it help your symptoms straight away?

No it didn't help them at all, which was bad um they, the consultant called me up after two weeks and was like are these drinks, you know, putting you into remission I was like no I still feel really unwell um and that was kind of like it was a bit like the symptoms of food poisoning just every night and every morning just feeling really unwell and having to go to the toilet a lot and having a lot of pain and you know when you know you're gonna be unwell and you sort of get sweaty and like it was like that um

Mmmm

And then, so they weren't helping and then I think because they just weren't very nice I was and because I was unwell I was losing quite a lot of weight

So um yeah I was losing weight and I didn't feel like I could exercise

Yeah

I didn't feel like I could socialise

Mmm

So yeah it just wasn't very fun

Yeah so they just so at what point then did they decide

Well they still asked me to stay on them for 5 weeks

Right

Because

Yeah

At least its easier for your tummy then real food

Ok

Ok, lovely, that's the first half. The answer to the question what experience is Vicky talking about with me? Is her experience of being diagnosed with Crohn's. She talks about the symptoms that prompted her to visit the GP, the investigative procedure of the colonoscopy and what happened following her initial diagnosis.

Secondly, she is describing the liquid only diet she was started on. Unfortunately, it wasn't a success for her, she continued to feel unwell, she was losing weight and didn't have the energy to exercise. It was also very difficult due to the impact it had on her being able to go out with friends to enjoy eating and drinking and I think how Vicky described this was really effective:

*and I feel like its alright when your at home but when your out and everyone just feels so sorry for you*

*Mmmm*

*So its quite you don't wanna make other people feel uncomfortable um and also it makes you realise your unwell because eating and drinking is such a normal part of the day and when that when all you've got is these drinks and you can't even look forward to it*

*Mmmm*

*Your like oh right I am really unwell now cos I can't even eat food like that's a bit shocking*

In the second half Vicky talks about the next treatment they tried her on. Infliximab infusions. This then led to her self-injecting a form of the same drug herself. Try and answer the questions:

How often does Vicky self-inject this drug? And where was she when she did her very first injection?

Um but in that time they got me on a um they got me ready to start on Infliximab infusions

Ok, ok

So that's when you go to hospital and just sit there while you get an infusion of the drugs

Right, right

Um and that worked almost instantly

Oh ok

Once I started that

And how often do you go, did you have to go for them?

Um I think I went about six times and it was kind of I went and then I went in two weeks time then I went in a months time then I went in six weeks time

Right

Um and they were sort of leaving longer and longer gaps to see how your body reacted

Mm mm

And so I did that from November until May of this year and then in May I started self-injecting every two weeks instead of having to go to hospital

Mm mm

So that's way easier, its so much less of an impact on your life just to inject once every two weeks

Mm mm so you do that, you do that now?

Yeah

Right, right and so did someone come round and show you how to do it

I had to have a video call with a nurse

Wow wow

And she had to watch me do the first one

Yeah

On the video call

And I actually had to go into the office on that day so I was in a meeting room (laughs) with my top up stabbing myself

Ah bless you

Um

Well, well done, well done

But yeah it uh lots of people have to self inject

True

Much more than every two weeks

Mmm

So, I mean it's so infrequent that I often forget to do it

Yeah

So, uh mm but yeah its its fine once you get used to it its nothing really so I feel really lucky

And is it uh so its just a subcutaneous injection

Exactly yeah so its just in a pen so you just

Oh ok

Push the pen into your tummy and wait and it just does it itself

Nice and do you have to keep it in the fridge?

Yeah you do have to keep it in the fridge

And then you have to remember to get it out the fridge half an hour before you want to use it

Yeah cos otherwise it stings a bit more



Yeah

Doesn't it when its cold

Apparently, it does yeah um and they yeah they deliver new ones when you need new ones and they take away your sharps bin when its full

Yeah yeah but its a it is an extra thing to think about isn't it

Yeah it is and you sort of have to cos I'm going on holiday

Mmm

In a few weeks for two weeks so I was trying to work out if I can if I'm gonna have to take an injection with me and if so like I think you get a certificate to say you know when your getting on the plane

Yeah

I'm allowed this injection but actually it'll work out luckily that I just inject on the day I go and then inject on the day I come back cos the two weeks have just worked out really well

Mmm mm

So its just yeah it is an extra thing to think about and keeping up with when your running out and ordering more and

Yeah

Keeping like in contact with the hospital so that they can like refill your prescription and it is just another layer of admin

Yeah yeah and um with your symptoms now how how would you describe them?

Yeah well um luckily I'm in remission

Right so I feel totally fine, which is really really good

Yeah

So I feel really lucky and its taken a while to get to this point because while their trying different drugs um sometimes you can have side effects and

Yeah

Um you know you can feel a bit unwell but the hospitals been so good at juggling things around and changing things so yeah

Did they prepare you for that period of trial and error and your expectations do you feel like they were managed?

Mmmm I'm not sure because I think, I think I felt every time we tried something new I kind of thought oh this'll be it

Mmmm

Um and when it wasn't I found that quite hard to take because you're so hopeful

Mmmm

And then it doesn't work out um and you think oh god I'm the one that they won't be able to treat but really you are you just have to find the right treatment

Yeah yeah

So

And where did you go for information was that something you wanted like some people when they have a new diagnosis or you know their really hungry for information some people like myself included actually I don't well I go through phases sometimes I wanna know sometimes I just want to uh not hear about it um

Yeah

What about you, did you

I was really trying to find out everything I could

Yeah

And the charity I think its called like the Crohn's and Colitis UK or something like that they have so much good information and they have information about every drug, every procedure they talk you through like what's gonna happen with colonoscopy's you know what the hospital will likely say about different drugs how you inject them, the potential side effects, you know, whether you can have alcohol with them all that kind of stuff so I read loads of that um and also on social media just like watching people's videos

Ok

On how they were dealing with their symptom's um and all their different experiences as well

Yeah so almost like a, like a community then

Yeah there is a really strong community around it and you can get involved as much or as little as you'd like

Yeah

Um which is really good and also I think I got invited to this like some um like online support groups and stuff so I did one of them which was really interesting before I started injecting one lady was on one of the support groups and she literally just injected before the video call so she was showing everyone like how to do it so that was just a funny coincidence but it's nice to know that other people are in a similar position

Yeah yeah

And were you signposted to that information by the nurses and doctors who you were working with?

Yeah definitely yeah all the doctors and nurses suggested the Crohn's charity website as a really good place to go and I think they work really closely together

Yeah

To provide information and support so

And uh finally so what range of healthcare professionals have you worked with?

Um lots of nurses and lots of research nurses who have been fab they are so quick on email their really supportive so yeah really supportive um the Consultant I've seen once and then I think a few Registrars

Mmm

I've seen um

And dieticians or

Oh I did see a dietician yes the first time I went to hospital I saw a dietician who gave me the drinks

(Laughs)

I've blocked him out of my mind

Poor guy

(laughs)

Um and then the pharmacist

He's got to deliver that bad news, here you go

Yeah so yeah I see the pharmacist quite a lot now picking up various things

Yeah

Um

Are they good for advice?

Um yeah they are and obviously yeah like now you know I'm um eligible for flu jabs and covid jabs so yeah I speak like I speak to my GP like way more so yeah its really different than before

Yeah yeah but a good sort of team for sorting out

Oh yeah yeah amazing

Different bits and bobs

I never really had to interact with the NHS like too much before and now I can't believe how amazing it is and yeah how brilliant everyone is and how responsive and knowledgeable, yeah it's been amazing

Ah I'm glad, I'm glad you've had that thank you Vicky for sharing with us

Your welcome

That's really really interesting thank you

Thank you for having me

Ok bye

Bye

Ok so the two questions we were listening for there were, how many times does Vicky self-inject? The answer is once every two weeks.

Where was she the first time, she self-injected? She was at work that day so administered the injection in a meeting room.

You heard Vicky describe how good the healthcare professionals she has worked with have been at supporting her. She described the research nurses as 'fab'. 'Fab' is a shortened version of the word fabulous. Fabulous is a strong adjective for when something is really good.

Excellent. Thank you again to Vicky for talking so openly to us about her health, I'm very grateful to her and feel it can do a lot to increase awareness of this condition. I have put a link to the Crohn and Colitis UK webpage that she mentioned as a fantastic source of information, where you can learn more about Crohn's and Colitis and also practice your reading skills.

Thank you so much for listening today. Excellent work. Please do share this podcast with anyone else you know who is learning English and is interested in health. You can get in touch with me through my website or at [helena@englishpracticeforhealthcare.com](mailto:helena@englishpracticeforhealthcare.com) if you have any questions at all about learning English and particularly English for healthcare and communication with patients. Ok look forward to speaking with you in the next episode! Thankyou, bye!