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After years of pain and sleepless nights, Leanne Curran's desperate online search for help changed everything

I was only 12 when I realised something was seriously wrong. It was November 1999 and I'd been sent home from school for the third time in a week so unwell I could barely function. By then, I'd been utterly exhausted for weeks, my body aching, constantly in pain. Aside from a recent bout of bronchitis and tonsillitis, I was usually healthy and active, dancing tap and ballet three times a week. This sudden shift from energetic to depleted made no sense.

Doctors had tested me for fibromyalgia, glandular fever and even leukaemia, but every result came back clear. The lack of answers was as draining as the symptoms themselves.

Frustrated and worried, my mum Julie, then 35, pressed for further investigation, and after reviewing everything my GP finally diagnosed me with myalgic encephalomyelitis.

I'd never heard of it. Also known as ME

and chronic fatigue syndrome, it's an incurable chronic condition that causes severe fatigue and pain throughout the body and is often triggered by a virus. It was overwhelming, but at least I now had a name for what I was experiencing.

Unfortunately, things didn't improve. By 13, I was being schooled by council-led tutors at home because I couldn't cope with full school days. Even at home, I only managed a couple of hours of lessons every other day before needing to rest.

Naps became part of my daily routine. Regular physio helped with muscle stiffness, but otherwise I spent much of my time laid up in bed, medicated with prescription painkillers and antibiotics.

My parents were at a loss. We tried eliminating dairy, sugar and wheat from my diet hoping it might ease my symptoms. Nothing helped.

After puberty, things improved.

I managed to pass four GCSEs and in 2008, I went to King's College London. Although fatigue remained a persistent issue, the pain eased, and I gained a degree and later a masters in 2013. After university, I found a job in retail, lived in London with a friend and learnt to manage my energy levels and pain.

Then in April 2018, after my flatmate moved out and my work contract ended, Mum suggested that I move back home and I agreed. Soon



Acupuncture has been life-changing for Leanne

after, my health declined again. The pain intensified and I spent long bouts in bed. I struggled with insomnia, sometimes going 48 hours without sleep, leaving me exhausted and battling brain fog.

Doctors couldn't do much, and as my mid-30s approached, I watched friends settling down, while I felt stuck.

Desperate, I spent sleepless nights searching online for answers. Then, one night in February

2024, at 4am, I read about acupuncture. I remembered it once helped my dad Tony with neck pain and decided it was worth a try. I booked an appointment, and a week later, I met the practitioner Sahar Hooti at the accredited Acucare Clinic in Portsmouth.

During my first session, she put needles in my left leg and arm. After 10 minutes, my left side felt lighter, like it was floating, and my right side felt heavy, like it was sinking. It was surreal, yet after that first session, my pain eased and mentally I felt stronger too.

Encouraged, I booked regular appointments, and after six months, Dad commented how much brighter I seemed. I felt it, too. I wasn't cured – I never will be – but now I have fewer sleepless nights and spend less time in bed. I've even stopped taking prescription painkillers.

I see Sahar monthly and although I still experience ups and downs and can't say acupuncture will help all ME patients, for me, those needles have made my life feel worthwhile again.

'ME left me exhausted and battling brain fog'



Leanne with acupuncturist

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