

# 'I won't let Tourette's hold me back'

Ruth Ojadi was distraught when she developed tics in her teens, but she's come to accept them



Ruth was diagnosed with Tourette's at 23

**W**alking along the street, I can feel myself about to shout out a word so obscene that people are guaranteed to stare.

**But no matter what I do to stop myself, it tumbles out of my mouth anyway.**

I was 16 when the right corner of my mouth started to drop and my eye began to involuntarily twitch. Within a month it felt as though the entire left side of my head was being pulled backwards, causing me to make odd facial movements.

Worried, my mum took me to the doctor. The GP assured me it was just anxiety and exam stress, but it only got worse.

Soon I was making grunting noises, flapping my arms and shouting swear words as I walked along the street. I remember being terrified. At night, I'd lie awake worrying it was all in my head and willing my body to do what I wanted.

As the years passed, I developed ways to hide the tics. If I felt myself about to grunt, I'd look down and pretend I was coughing. If my arm jerked, I'd move it up to look as though I was running my fingers through my hair. But the sounds got louder and the movements more exaggerated.

I could yell out anything – from 'bomb' as I walked through an airport to 'cankles'

as I passed a stranger. It was mortifying and I began to dread going out. I stopped seeing my friends and grew more and more self-conscious. Still, my GP assured me it would go away.

It was only aged 23 that I got a second opinion. After an hour-long consultation, I was told I had Tourette's. While part of me felt relieved to know what was wrong, I remember being heartbroken – there was no cure, I'd have to live like this forever.

I was prescribed medication to help suppress the tics, but they left me exhausted. I also put on 5st, taking me from 11st and a size 10-12 to 16st and a size 16-18.

I grew more depressed by the day and for the next year, instead of living, I simply existed.

Then, in 2010, I got up one day and realised I had two options – I could spend my life as a recluse or I could accept who I was.

It wasn't easy but, after speaking with my doctor, I stopped my medication and began cognitive behavioural therapy – which helps retrain your negative thought process into a positive one. It's made me realise that when people look at me in the street, it's because I've startled them, not because they think I'm a bad person.

I've lost the weight I gained, got a job working as a group support officer for the

**'I REFUSE TO APOLOGISE ANY MORE'**

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#### Maximise your vitamins!

'Make sure you're getting the vitamins you need and drink 100% fruit juice with your cereal in the morning,' says nutritionist Fiona Hunter. 'The vitamin C can boost iron absorption and help maintain healthy gums.'

#### Cycle as you work

Sitting for long periods of time can increase your risk of stroke, heart disease and diabetes.

But if you don't feel like standing all day, try the Digital Display Pedal Exerciser (£29.99, betterlifehealthcare.com) – it fits perfectly under a desk!



#### Wipe it clean

Dishcloths in the UK have been deemed among the dirtiest in the world. Help keep your home clean with Dettol Anti-Bacterial Cleansing Surface Wipes (£2 for 36, tesco.com) – they kill 99.9% of harmful bacteria and viruses. ☺

