

My name is Kat, I'm a Hamiltonian, a Motion Graphics Designer and I have endometriosis.

As a teenager, I thought period pain was normal. Because I was quite a shy wee thing, I got embarrassed if the word 'period' was even mentioned and I didn't really talk about it at all. I also thought it was normal to go through that much pain each month and that it looked like everyone else was coping with it so much better than I was. I ended up at the school Nurse's office a lot. I would miss social outings with my friends and some classes. Somehow I managed to keep going to the majority of classes even though I felt like curling up into a ball and hiding from the world.

I went away to the School of Art in Dunedin after I finished High School. Over my time there the pain increased in intensity and had started to happen throughout the month too, not just when I had my period. I finally went to a doctor to try to find out what was happening. I had numerous tests over the early years of pain for appendicitis and I had a laparoscopy where they found a cyst on one of my ovaries.

After this the pain hadn't reduced its onslaught. After many trips to doctors, I still didn't have a definite diagnosis. I started to feel like I was going crazy as I thought I wasn't strong enough to handle the pain like everyone else. I was finally put in touch with a specialist and had another laparoscopy. Endometriosis was discovered. It felt great to know that what I was going through actually had a name, that it wasn't normal, and I wasn't alone. A few months on I started to feel a lot better, but my old friend pain came back again so I started on the contraceptive pill which my body didn't agree with. I then tried a Mirena to try to help with the pain.

After months of things not really settling down, I got very sick and had to take a lot of time off work. I have been so lucky over my career to have understanding employers who have been super-supportive with my condition. I went to an awesome Doctor in Auckland, where I was living at the time. She got me into hospital quickly to have a scan to see what was going on. Unfortunately they found that the Mirena had perforated my uterus when it had been originally inserted. It had actually ended up near my bowel and wasn't where it was supposed to be. Apparently there is something like a 1 in 10,000 chance of this happening. A lot of my friends have them and are completely fine with them. I had another laparoscopy to remove it and the surgeon also removed the endometriosis that had returned.

I have since changed my diet over the years and have been wheat- and gluten-free for about six years. I found this has not only helped my stomach but has helped me feel a lot more energetic around period time. I do yoga and meditate most days and my moods are a lot more even. I have had hypnotherapy for the pain which helped a lot as it made me relax, I have started having relaxation massages and try to keep stress to a minimum.

Dairy products and alcohol are pretty limited in my diet and I don't eat a lot of meat any more. Nutritionists have helped too. I have taken vitamin supplements to give me a boost. It is hard to fight pain when you're already running on empty in the energy department. Positive thinking helps. Sometimes it is difficult to see through the fog of pain when it comes, but thinking positively really helps to combat the

dullness that can compound everything when you're exhausted from battling physically and mentally.

I'm in a really great place with my health now and only have pain a couple of days a month at the start of my period. It doesn't knock me off my feet like it used to. I'm extremely lucky to have a wonderful husband who is so very understanding and supportive. We have set up our own motion graphics company so work for ourselves. This means I can work around times when I may need a little more rest than usual. My condition in the past has ebbed and flowed so to speak. I used to wait for people/medical staff to suggest plans of action. Now I take my own proactive approach as well as research ways and means to help myself.

I also talk about my condition a lot more. This has helped other friends who have had similar experiences and lead to them being diagnosed with the condition too.

I am now a volunteer with Insight Endometriosis, which I really enjoy. I love to help as I find it really rewarding to be involved in helping raise awareness about endometriosis in the greater community.

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**For more information:**

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