My Health & Blog Story

My name is Gemma, or Gembles, as my little brother calls me, and I am so excited to have you here!

A few years ago, I began a blog; a chronicle of glimpses into my life; the intention to briefly explain a photograph that summed up my day. This blog developed into sharing my experiences and struggles as my health started to deteriorate. I have learned so much from reading others' experiences that I now blog to share some insights and lessons too, and hopefully help other people on their path. I have always enjoyed writing and reading, and my blog also enables me to get my thoughts and experiences out on (electronic) paper, and hopefully improve my writing ability.

During my childhood and teens, I developed various symptoms, which became more severe over the years. After countless doctor visits and tests, and feeling like I was going crazy after repeatedly being told nothing was wrong, I was finally diagnosed at age 26, in 2011, with **fructose malabsorption**. This seemed restrictive and overwhelming, and then more tests showed that I had several other **severe food intolerances** (wheat, dairy, egg, and peanuts to name the main ones!). My diet became very strict (almost non-existent!), and there were months of gruelling elimination diets to test my tolerance levels.

A lot of my symptoms improved following the change in my diet, however some things were still not right. I continued to experience other symptoms such severe fatigue, lack of stamina, and poor concentration (brain fog), which were really impacting on my ability to do day to day activities. In 2012, I was diagnosed with the autoimmune condition called **Hashimoto's Thyroiditis**. I was also diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E) in 2013, however, this diagnosis was dropped later on. Symptoms I'd had for a long

time continued to worsen, such as major light headedness, dizziness, orthostatic intolerance, nausea, palpitations and chest pain. When I was a young child, I was diagnosed with **chronic orthostatic hypotension**, which means by blood pressure drops when I change position. In January 2014, I finally discovered that one of the main fundamental causes of a lot of my issues, and possibly all of my health issues, is **Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS)/dysautonomia.** All of this meant that driving, working and a certain level of independence became a distant memory.

In 2014, I began a diet called the Autoimmune Protocol (AIP), which is focused on eliminating foods that may aggravate or cause autoimmune diseases. I love food and cooking, so I am determined to not let my restricted diet keep me from delicious tastes and fun in the kitchen. I enjoy creating new food ideas, and so this blog has become a place where I can share my recipes so that other people with food intolerances, allergies and clean eating lifestyles can see that living life with a strict diet does not have to mean tasteless, boring food. In 2016, my intolerance to meat came to a head and I decided to stop eating it, and slowly brought back in some grains (which are avoided on the AIP diet) into my diet. My antibody blood tests showed no bad effect from doing so, and as some of my symptoms (pain and tachycardia after eating) have improved without meat, I have maintained this diet adjustment for the time being.

At the end of 2015, I was diagnosed with **epilepsy (absence seizures).** This is something that has occurred since I was a child, but has taken some time to be identified. I now take medication for this and it is under control. I even got cleared to start driving again in 2019! (I’m taking it very slowly and carefully though, so I am only driving short distances occasionally when I’m up to it)

In June, 2017, I fell off an electric bike and broke my ribs in six places. As it was a pretty low speed fall (more like a

topple!), I had my bone density tested. Turns out I have **osteoporosis**! Hello body of a 90 year old! So more tests and medication and diet changes have come from that.

Having chronic health issues is definitely a challenge; something that has turned my life upside down. However, it has helped to learn to be stronger, to keep positive (most of the time!), and to enjoy the small things. It has shown me the people in my life who are important to me. It has made me feel blessed and value what I do have, as sadly, a lot of people have it a lot worse than me.

Finding out I had POTS was a monumental diagnosis, as it meant that I started various medications, and a couple finally helped to a certain degree. I went from being bed bound for hours each day to being able to get out the house, and eventually go to university.

I used to work as a cardiac paediatric nurse, but I couldn't do it anymore as it is a strenuous job and I stopped nursing at the end of 2012, which still upsets me greatly. After two years of not being able to work, I began a writing course in 2015; a Diploma in Creative and Professional Writing. I completed this in 2016, and in 2017, commenced a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Creative and Professional Writing. I am studying part time, and I rely on a lot of help to be able to cope with it physically, but it is doing me a lot of good – it gives me something to focus on in my life, and it is something I have long dreamed of doing, so brings a good out of a bad. I absolutely love studying writing and literature. At the moment, I'm not sure what direction I will go after I graduate, but I'm looking forward to it!

Alongside uni and writing, I enjoy reading, baking, craft, mulling over a cuppa tea, pilates, blogging, photography, cuddles with my beautiful shih tzu, Captain Albi, and spending time with my family and friends. I also am quite skilled at marathon stints of tv series and movies!

I look forward to getting to know you, whether you have a similar story or a vastly different one. Please say hello!