

'MY LIFE IN A DAY'

# DEBORAH JONES

The former deputy head teacher-turned-writer, broadcaster and founder of @bowelbabe talks about living with cancer

**'I get up at 7am, have a breakfast of scrambled egg on toast with tomatoes and a green smoothie, and am out of the house by 8.30am for work, unless I'm writing from home. Before my diagnosis of bowel cancer, in 2016, I was a busy mum of two working as a deputy head teacher at a secondary school with the best routine ever. Now, there's no routine in my life, but I love that my days are so varied. As well as writing my 'Things Cancer Made Me Say' column for *The Sun* and recording my 'You, Me and the Big C' podcast for BBC Radio 5 Live – which I used to do with BBC journalist Rachael Bland until she sadly passed away in 2018 – I also do charity work for Cancer Research UK, Bowel Cancer UK and The Royal Marsden hospital, where I'm still treated, do public speaking, attend events and record radio and TV appearances. I also run my Instagram account @bowelbabe.'**

## SPREADING THE WORD

'The best part of my job is meeting people and having them share their stories. It's incredible when someone says that, because of me, they got checked, diagnosed at an early stage, and are now cancer-free.'

'At the age of 35, I started having some classic symptoms of bowel cancer, including a change of bowel habits, pooing blood, losing weight, and feeling tired. I went to my GP, and when my blood tests and poo sample came back normal, they said it was IBS. But things got worse.'



Spreading the word on *London Live* with Andrea Turner



It took me a good six months to get a diagnosis because, I didn't fit the mould of a typical bowel cancer sufferer (50 and over), whereas I was a fit, young vegetarian.

'However, around 2,500-3,000 people under 50 in the UK are diagnosed every year (the total being 44,000, of which 16,000 will die), and sadly, most younger people are diagnosed when it's already metastatic, meaning that the cancer has spread from its origin to other parts of the body, mainly because people haven't believed their symptoms.'

'Early diagnosis is a key message to get across, which is why I'm telling people about OneWelbeck\* (onewelbeck.com) – a bespoke day surgery facility where you can be screened for bowel cancer.'

## FULL LIFE

'Despite my various ongoing treatments, I will never be cured from cancer. My biggest ambition is to stay alive and have fun with my husband and kids.'



Deborah is making every second count

'Professionally, my proudest achievement was seeing my first book, *F\*\*\* you Cancer: How to Face the Big C, Live your Life and Still be Yourself* (Vermilion, £9.99), be published and become a best seller – I'm writing a second book now and I hope I get to finish it. I'm normally out most evenings at events, not getting to bed until 1am. But running is my meditation, and I normally do three 5ks a week (as well as charity race events) while listening to cheesy musicals soundtracks like *The Greatest Showman* or *A Star Is Born*. And I love my weekends with my family, watching the kids play sports, having a movie night all together and enjoying a Sunday roast – unless I'm throwing a house party!'

## DEBORAH'S WELLBEING TIPS

- 'Never wait to check out a health concern. Get it assessed. You are never wasting a doctor's time.'
- 'Recognise that you need to be kind to yourself. Go easy on yourself if you're going through a tough time.'
- 'Take things one step at a time. If you're newly diagnosed or living with illness, don't always think the worst. The reality is none of us know what's going to happen in the future.'

WORDS: Jo Ebsworth MAIN IMAGE: Courtesy The Sun \*OneWelbeck is a specialist facility for minimally invasive day surgery and outpatient diagnostics in the UK, as featured in the Bowel Cancer episode of *London Lives* Hot Topic series with Anthea Turner.