



# 'The skin disease turned me into a mannequin'

*Cheryl, 50, from Warrington, Cheshire, opens to Na Ao about her battle against a rare skin disease that drastically changed her life within 6 months.*

It was a normal day in November 2021, when Cheryl Iddon was seized by a strange heaviness in her chest while she got ready for a workout.

As a former fitness instructor and qualified holistic therapist, Cheryl had always been physically active and loved running and exercising. But suddenly, she found herself in a body of a stranger as she was in so much pain, she couldn't do a burpee.

She'd lost count of days since her ankle started to swell up, spilling over the edges of her trainers; she could hardly bend her fingers as they had gone tight and puffy. The itchy sensation kept her up at night.

Her movements grew rigid and regular daily activities slowly became extremely exhausting.

Despite two visits to the A&E, the doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with her. The prescribed steroids had not alleviated her pain, nor did they improve her situation.

Following the unsuccessful diagnoses at several other hospitals, the mum-of-three was determined to find out the cause of her discomfort and frustration.

Eventually, she managed to secure an appointment with a rheumatology specialist.

Waiting outside of the doctor's office with her husband, Phillip, 64, and feeling the anxiety rise

like a tide in her chest, her knees began to buckle.

The skin assessment which started from her toes to the head eventually reflected the severity of her condition.

She was diagnosed with an incredibly rare skin disease called Diffused Cutaneous Systemic Scleroderma. It undermined her movement, ate away at her mobility, and weakened her legs as she went about her everyday business.

At that moment, she felt a blanket of despair settling over her and cried her heart out like a wounded animal.

she couldn't control it but found her mind slipping toward a dark space: "I am going to die. This disease will take everything away from me."

The invisible illness has since reset the rhythms of her life. She lost the ability to fasten a bra, put on a pair of socks, or open a bottle of wine.

She also left behind a career that she loved, The Neat Freak, which helped organise and declutter houses and offices.

"This disease makes you like a

mannequin. My legs are very solid. It's like being a cricketer and wearing the shin pads down the front of your trousers all the time," Cheryl said.

Seeing the drastic change in Cheryl has never been easy. It saddens Phillip to see how the disease slowly and cruelly stripped her mobility within six months—the unexpected turn in their eight-year marriage.

Days were spent where there wasn't a minute that she stopped wrestling with a churning sense of hopelessness.

Knowing that hypnotherapy had worked wonders with Cheryl's anxiety about childbirth when she was pregnant with her first child, she decided to seek therapy again.

It was with the help of the therapy that she was able to see past the shock and frustration.

"I must have just sat there and bawled my eyes out", Cheryl recalled of her first Hypnotherapy session.

In her head, she invented a boiler in a cave.

There were knobs for pain, itchiness, fear, and illness. She snapped the knobs off so they could never go up again.

"It's like someone flicked the switch in my brain. It has been a game changer," she said.

*Scleroderma is a rare, chronic skin condition that causes hard, thickened areas of skin. There are 19,000 people living with Scleroderma in the UK.*

Her fear started to wane after two sessions of therapy. Step by step, she built up the faith that there's always light at the end of the tunnel. The diagnosis cannot write her life story, nor could take away her ability to lead a

happy life.

Every medical challenge she's been through and every obstacle she's encountered: getting out of the bath or putting up Christmas decorations, became a proving ground for her identity: she is a fighter.

"I had someone assist in wiping my bum."

Scleroderma tripped up her immune system in such a way that it started attacking the organs from within.

To stop the illness from progressing, Cheryl had to receive chemotherapy and stem-cell replacement in April 2022 to reset her immune system.

