

'It's okay not to be okay'

Robert Nodwell

news@corkindependent.com

When former Manchester United midfielder Darren Fletcher was diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) in 2011, not many people were too familiar with the condition at first.

The Scottish midfielder has since helped publicise and make people more aware of IBD and he has also supported the charity United for Colitis, while the huge publicity he generated after making his struggle public became known as the 'Darren Fletcher effect'.

Many young sufferers would have taken comfort in the ability to relate to someone famous who has gone or are currently going through the same struggles and for Fermoy teenager Denis Cremin, it gave him extra motivation to deal with his condition.

Having been diagnosed with Crohn's Disease when he was just 12, the drastic changes were a little bit hard for Denis to comprehend. "I remember being in shock alright, but I just think I was so young at the time that I found it hard to understand," says Denis.

"I don't think it's something that a 12 year old can fully grasp. I remember not



Denis Cremin is highlighting IBD. PHOTO: JAMES HURLIHY/SWAY TREE MEDIA

having much energy and not being able to eat, plus I would get sick a lot after eating. As a result I lost a lot of weight, so much so that my dad could pick me up with one hand.

"I ended up being in the doctor almost every second day. It was Crumlin Hospital in Dublin who finally diagnosed me, I think it took around two or three months. I was just so young that I didn't really know what was going on.

"It was a time of my life as well where I should have been hanging out with my

friends but I couldn't. I was stuck in bed a lot of the time and I missed a lot of fifth and sixth class. I was missing my friends, I couldn't even leave the house," says Denis.

As a result, Denis' confidence diminished hugely. Instead of going on trips away with the class, the pitch and putt enthusiast was laid low with a form of confinement. Indeed, there are 20,000 sufferers in Ireland and 49 per cent said they have lost or have had to leave a job because of the illness.

Although his medication

helped, with the requirement being to take up to 12 steroids a day, his weight ballooned and this was in stark contrast to his previously limber and athletic physique.

"I completely lost all my energy as well," he says. "I used to play pitch and putt and I played soccer with Fermoy as well, but during this time I couldn't even go to the shop. I just didn't have the energy for anything.

"Thankfully I'm in a much better way nowadays, but there are things I still worry about on a daily

basis. I always worry that I may need to go the bathroom so when I go to Dublin I always take precautions, like seeing if there's bathrooms near the exits. Ask anyone that has the condition, they all worry about the same things.

"For me, it's always on my mind. Another sufferer described to me recently how it's almost like a 24-hour bug; it can hit you instantly at any given time. I saw that Darren Fletcher had a form of the disease too and he was still managing to go out and play every week, I definitely found that inspiring. The famous magician Dynamo also came out recently and confirmed he also suffers from it, so people know now they're not alone," he adds.

In December 2015, Denis became aware of a movement on Facebook that was attempting to promote awareness of the condition.

Englishman Ste Walker and Scotswoman Lauryn Morgan have started the hashtag 'sickbutinvisible' and it has gained international recognition, with 24 year old Walker attracting thousands of followers.

"I came across Ste on Facebook and have been following him since," says Denis. "It's because of him

that I'm doing this, I found him an inspiration and he's honestly been through far more than I have. He's made people suffering more comfortable because usually they're afraid of what people may think.

"I'm past it; I can't change it. I've received texts from people I don't know around Cork just to thank me for what I've been doing, but I don't want to take credit for any of it, I just want to create awareness."

The video he has made with Sway Tree Media has become an online sensa-

tion with 20,000 views in its first day alone.

It is clear that it has touched many and that the movement to increase awareness of the condition is well and truly growing, with Denis giving a frank summary: "Nobody is going to live our lives for us, we've got to do it ourselves."

The video featuring Denis Cremin is now available on the 'Sway Tree Media' Facebook page. It was shot and produced by James Herlihy, with the assistance of Joanne O'Flynn.

UCC research predicts childhood allergies

Darragh Conneely

dconneely@corkindependent.com

The weakness of a newborn infant's skin barrier can help predict and prevent the development of food and other allergies such as asthma in later life, UCC research has revealed.

Paediatricians in UCC's School of Medicine published the findings in the world's leading allergy journal, the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and show for the first time that simple non-invasive measurements of skin barrier function in the first few days of life can predict the development of

food allergy.

The study found that food allergies are associated with skin barrier defects, even in children who do not get eczema and such a correlation can be found even before the newborn leaves the maternity hospital.

Professor Jonathan Hourihane, Head of Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at UCC, said of the findings: "We think this research has great potential in that it not only grants us a platform to comprehend how allergies may start, but should allow us to design and develop further studies and clinical trials in the years ahead which will

help us understand how to prevent allergies right from day one. These future trials potentially offer hope that the onset of lifelong allergic conditions, which has reached epidemic proportions, may be amenable to simple, early-life preventative strategies."

The information was collected by the BASELINE cohort study and jointly funded by Ireland's National Children's Research Centre and the UK Food Standards Agency.

Recruitment took place in Cork University Maternity Hospital and the follow up visits took place UCC's HRB-funded Children's Discovery Centre.



PHOTO: INGIMAGE

CNM COLLEGE OF NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

TRAINING SUCCESSFUL PRACTITIONERS

Q: HOW YOU CAN BEAT COLDS AND FLU WITH THESE IMMUNE-BOOSTING FOODS:



Sometimes it can seem like a challenge to escape the common cold and flu, which is so abundant at this time of year. Harsh weather conditions, along with busy, crowded commutes to and from work and a lack of sunlight mean that we can all too easily fall prey.

Here are some helpful tips on what foods you can easily added to your daily meals that will help to boost your immune system and keep you strong and healthy.

- Spices, such as turmeric and ginger (powder or root). These are highly-beneficial addition to the diet, thanks to their ability to reduce inflammation in the body. Add turmeric powder to your rice or curry dishes or grate the fresh root into soups.
- Onions and garlic are high in quercetin, a phytonutrient which also has potent anti-inflammatory properties. Increase your intake by adding these to soups, stews or stir-frys.
- Beta-carotene, which is an antioxidant, is also very beneficial. Antioxidants have been shown to protect the immune system, protect against cell-damaging free radicals and lower the risk of developing cancer and heart disease. Beta-carotene-rich foods include kale and other dark, leafy greens, egg yolks, fish and all yellow-coloured fruits and vegetables, such as apricots, carrots and butternut squash.
- Probiotic rich foods, e.g. sauerkraut, kefir, miso, kombucha, natural probiotic yogurts are a great way to increase the good bacteria in your gut which help keep colds and flus at bay.

This information has been brought to you by Nutritional Therapist and College of Naturopathic Medicine graduate Caroline Punch, who specialises in digestive health. If you would like to find out how you can train at CNM Cork for an exciting new career in Naturopathic Nutrition, join us on our next free open evening:

Wednesday 16th March, 7-9pm
Reserve your free place online at
www.naturopathy.ie