

Gut reactions

Kiasha Patel was put on a cocktail of six powerful drugs at the age of 14 after she developed gut problems—and it would change the life of her mother, Nishta



Nishta Patel's life changed when she finally decided to take charge of the treatment of her daughter, who had been bombarded with some of the most powerful pharmaceuticals—including a chemotherapy agent—to treat a bowel problem.

This summer, Nishta graduates from the College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM) in London, and plans to set up her own nutritional therapy centres in her home town of Bromley and in London with her friend.

None of this was even on the horizon five years ago when her daughter Kiasha, then aged 14, started to notice blood in her stools after a family holiday cruise to Alaska. She needed to go to the toilet six times a day, and she complained of intense pain and of passing blood.

At the local hospital, the family was told it was nothing to worry about unless Kiasha's frequency increased to 10 times a day and there was more blood in her stools. When her symptoms worsened, tests revealed a *Clostridium difficile* bacterial infection, and she was sent home with some antibiotics.

Kiasha's family decided to investigate further and took her to see a paediatric

gastroenterologist, who diagnosed proctitis (inflammation of the rectum) after carrying out a colonoscopy and endoscopy. He prescribed predfoam enemas, a corticosteroid treatment that is now discontinued in the UK, along with Asacol (mesalamine), an anti-inflammatory.

Kiasha suffered "horrendous headaches and nausea", said Nishta, so the gastroenterologist altered the dose. He also added Prilosec (omeprazole), a proton pump inhibitor, for her heartburn, and Stemetil (prochlorperazine maleate), for sickness and nausea, to the mix.

She went in and out of remission, but when symptoms worsened again, the gastroenterologist also prescribed oral prednisolone, a powerful anti-inflammatory steroid that blocks the immune system. Her symptoms got worse again and so another immunosuppressant, azathioprine, was prescribed. The drug is usually given to transplant patients to prevent rejection of the new organ.

Not surprisingly, Kiasha started to suffer some very serious side-effects, including joint pain, which worsened by the day. "It was so sad seeing my little girl fading day by day," said Nishta, 47.

Finally, the specialist said he "had no alternative" but to put her on Remicade (infliximab), a potent member of the 'anti-TNF' family that blocks tumour necrosis factor (TNF)-alpha protein. However, it can also cause cancer and tuberculosis (TB).

Nishta decided to seek a second opinion—but the new doctor recommended Kiasha be put on 6-mercaptopurine (6-MP), a

chemotherapy agent. He also suggested dropping azathioprine, but this still meant the 14-year-old girl was taking a cocktail of six highly powerful drugs.

After Kiasha had been on the chemo agent for a short while, Nishta said she finally came to "the end of my tether" and started to do her own research. She soon came across Jini Patel Thompson, who cured her Crohn's disease through diet and remains drug-free 20 years later. She wrote about her experience and her protocols in her book, *Listen to Your Gut* (Vancouver, BC: Caramal Publishing, 2006).

Nishta bought all of Jini's products, which are shipped over from the US, and "slowly but surely we started to see signs of improvement, and I was able to slowly take her off all the drugs". Nine months later, Kiasha was drug-free.

When Kiasha went for her routine colonoscopy checkup, the doctor was delighted with the results. "Congratulations, the medicine is working," he said. "I had to tell him that Kiasha wasn't taking any of the drugs, and hadn't for nine months," said Nishta. The specialist then said she had been very foolish and accused her of witchcraft! "If this child loses her colon, this will be down to you and not me. You have been very irresponsible," he told her.

Kiasha was nonetheless a thousand times better, and Nishta said her interest in nutrition became an obsession, prompting her to enroll at the CNM in 2012 to study naturopathic nutrition.

"I have helped dozens of friends and family regain their health and helped them come off dangerous drugs," she said.

As for Kiasha, Nishta believes she did indeed pick up the *C. difficile* bug while on the family cruise, and it wasn't helped by Kiasha's diet at the time. Conscious of her body image, as so many teenage girls are, she wasn't eating any fats. As a result, her immune system was already below par.

Today, Kiasha still experiences a few flare-ups, but these are often associated with the stress of school exams. She is also now watched over by a new specialist, who admits that the previous doctors were far too aggressive in their prescribing for a condition that was never more than a mild form of inflammation.

Nishta would second that.

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"The doctor accused me of witchcraft after I got my daughter off all the drugs and improved her bowel condition with nutrition"