

I wasn't skinny I was sick!

Mum-of-two Emily Bain, 41, was eating loads but dropped to 7st. Now she has overcome her life-crushing illness and is a fitness convert

Standing on Snowdonia, looking over the rugged landscape, I could have cried with joy. It had been a struggle. I'd moaned at times, sobbed in pain when I fell, but now I'd done the National Three Peaks challenge and I was euphoric.

If you'd told me six years ago I'd be well enough to climb a mountain, I wouldn't have believed you. Back then I was battling a rare disease that left me dangerously thin, lifeless and depressed – and threatened to end my marriage.

It all started in 2008 shortly after my first child Billy was born. He was premature at 34 weeks, and as I tried to care for him, my heart was constantly racing, my hands trembling. Then the panic

attacks started and it was impossible to pretend everything was normal. My GP put me on beta-blockers, but all I wanted was to sleep and eat.

Despite my appetite, my weight dropped from 10st to 7st, from size 10 to a tiny size 6. Deeply unhappy, I became irrational.

Billy developed breath-holding spells, which made me more anxious. He'd hold his breath until he turned blue in the face, and passed out for the first time when he was 12 months.

As I dialled 999, he seemed to recover. 'Don't worry,' the operator told me. But it was terrifying, and I felt totally overwhelmed at being a mum.

My husband Chas was convinced I had postnatal depression. But tensions grew between us and my emotions were so out of control, I asked him to leave.

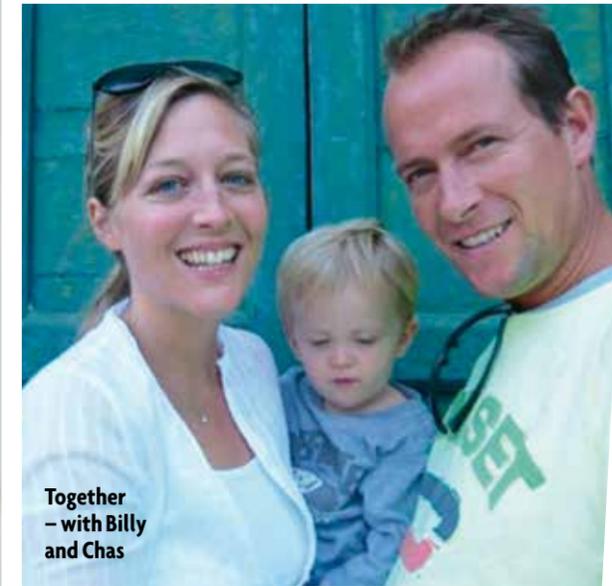
'I couldn't cope being a mum'

I burst into tears

Days later, I was in the park with Billy when I had a panic attack, and was unable to move. By chance a friend came along. 'I can't cope,' I confessed, bursting into tears.

My GP sent me straight to hospital for tests, and I asked Chas to come back to our home in Shepherd's Bush, London. At 7am the next morning, the doctor phoned to say I had Graves' disease – an auto-immune disease that is the most common cause of an overactive thyroid. My body was producing too much of the thyroid hormone, which explained my weight loss and panic attacks. It can be triggered by stress, infection or, some experts believe, by giving birth.

Without treatment I'd have heart failure, but hearing the diagnosis, I felt relief. It was the



Together – with Billy and Chas



Well again and hiking in Snowdonia

first step to getting better. I was put on Carbimazole to reduce the amount of thyroid hormone produced. But I still felt exhausted and depressed, and always had colds or flu.

It was a risk I'd take

In March 2009, I returned to work as a recruitment consultant, but the following month I lost my job. I couldn't afford to be unemployed, so I decided to start my own recruitment business, convincing my colleague Claire Gray to join me. We launched Bain & Gray (bainandgray.com) in the September and it took off.

I thought my problems were in the past when I agreed to speak at an event. I was on stage when I realised they weren't.

Two sentences in, I clammed up. My mind went blank as I looked at all the faces below. I was having a panic attack, and Claire had to take over.

I'd read about radioiodine treatment – in the form of a radioactive pill that destroys

most of the tissue in the thyroid

– and I begged my doctor to let me try it. I was told it could make me infertile, but I didn't care.

Thankfully it worked. After two years, I finally felt 100 per cent again. What's more, I discovered I was pregnant with my daughter, Kiki.

Things just got better, and Chas and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary last month.

Now I'm categorised as having an underactive thyroid, which means I easily put on weight.

In the past I hated exercise, but now it's vital to keep fit and eat a natural, sugar-free diet. I exercise several times a week with my trainer Nix. The fact I'm now a total fitness convert, who can climb mountains, is nothing short of a miracle.

◆ Visit nixercise.co.uk

'Things have just got better'

THYROID'S Need to know

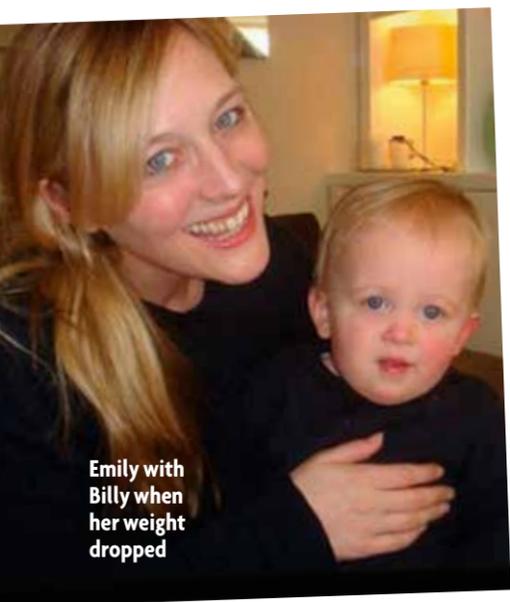
One in 20 people in the UK suffers from a thyroid disorder. Dr Auldrick Ratajczak, Deputy Medical Director of Wellbeing at Nuffield Health, explains...

WHAT DOES THE THYROID DO? The thyroid gland in the front of the neck produces two hormones (thyroxine and triiodothyronine), and secretes them via the blood. Too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism) causes cells to work faster than normal. Too little (hypothyroidism) has the opposite effect.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED? A simple blood test measures thyroid hormones, but thyroid problems overlap with other health conditions,

so diagnosis can be difficult. If you have the following persistent symptoms, talk to your GP:

- ◆ Fatigue, slow movement and speech, cold intolerance, constipation, weight gain and a slow pulse. It could be an underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism).
- ◆ Anxiety, mood swings, weakness, tremor, palpitations, heat intolerance, increased perspiration, and weight loss despite a normal or increased appetite are signs of an overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism).



Emily with Billy when her weight dropped