

Holly Moscrop's ambitions to become a farmer were put on hold when, aged just 16, ME turned her life upside down. But her strength of character has enabled her to use her skills and capabilities to add value to the family farm's output. **Chloe Dunne** reports.

Growing up on her family's 90-hectare (222-acre) beef and arable farm on the outskirts of Leeds, Holly Moscrop says she always wanted to be a farmer.

But as she turned 16, she was knocked off her 'meticulously planned path' of A-levels and university when she developed myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and postural tachycardia syndrome (PoTS).

As a result, the straight-A student was forced to drop out of secondary school and became confined to her bedroom.

But she has not let that stop her and is intent on pursuing her passion for the sector.

Holly developed ME, also known as chronic fatigue syndrome, in 2012 after a viral infection.

Explaining the condition, Holly says: "ME is a dysfunction of the neurological, immune, endocrine and energy metabolism systems and means your cells struggle to make enough energy."

"Symptoms can vary massively between people and from day-to-day and it is a very misunderstood illness, but common features include severe fatigue and weakness, pain, sensory sensitivities and cognitive problems, all exasperated by any kind of exertion."

"For me, it feels like being submerged in concrete – my body feels completely overwhelmed."

Holly also suffers from PoTS, an illness commonly associated with ME which affects processes of the nervous system, including heart rate and blood pressure.

She explains that while ME or PoTS remain significantly under-researched areas, there is no proven treatment and recovery is often 'down to luck'.

"To begin with I struggled to sit up, or even be able to read or watch TV – I was almost completely bed-bound for nearly four years," she says.

"As I slowly accepted I needed to rest and let my body take charge, I have seen slow but steady improvements."

"Eight years later, I am still largely house-bound, but I am able to do more things indoors, like baking

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HOLLY MOSCROP

and writing and with the help of my six-wheel power wheelchair I am actually able to go outside and visit the farm some days."

Holly's family keeps 33 Limousin and Lincoln Red cows plus followers at Stockheld Grange Farm, alongside an agricultural contracting business.

Three years into her journey, one of the first things Holly did as her condition began to improve was get her dad to install cameras in the cow shed so she could see them from her bedroom.

"Being able to watch the cows was the first step towards me feeling part of the farm again," Holly says.

Farm accounts

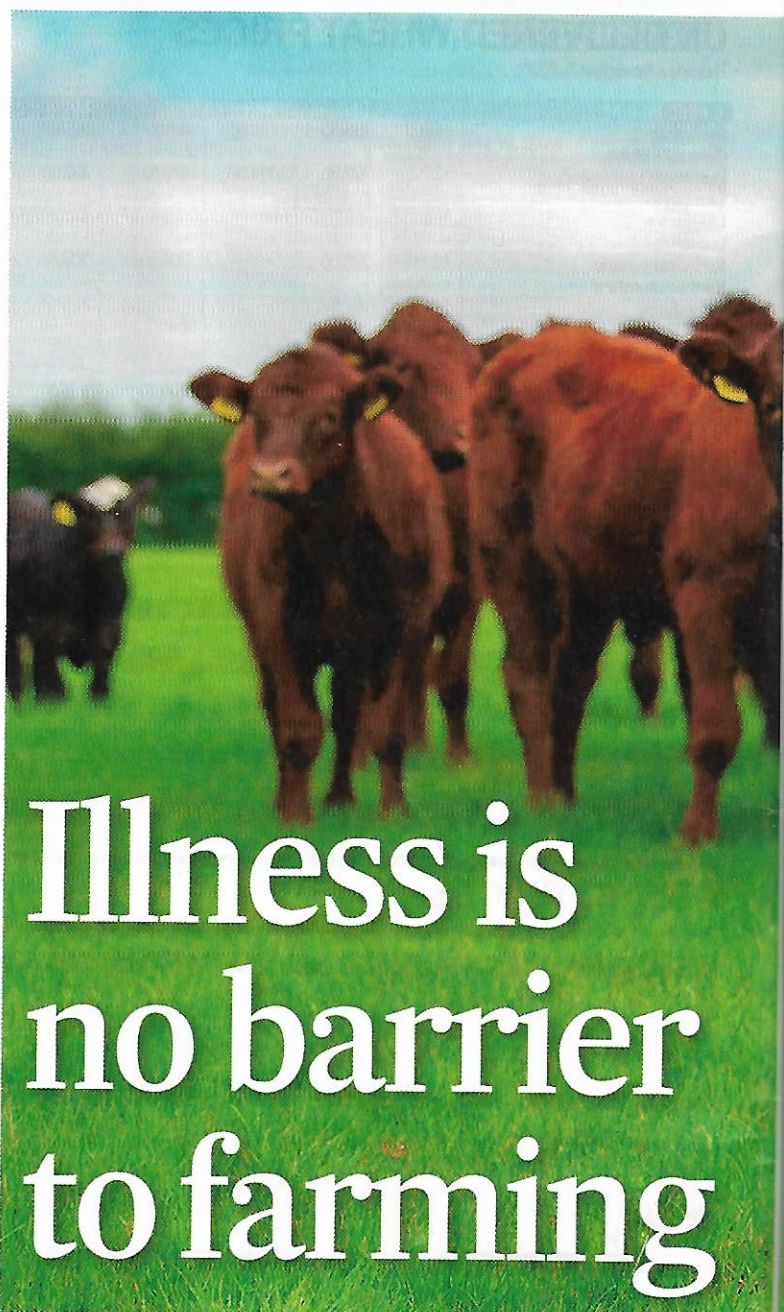
As Holly's condition has continued to improve she has also become more involved with the farm accounts and now handles all of the farm admin.

"It has been a gradual process but handling the accounts has been another way I have been able to get involved with the farm," she says.

"As I have slowly been able to increase my activity I have taken on responsibility for all the invoicing, accounts, tax returns and general admin for the farm and contracting business."

One of the areas which Holly has had the most input in is improving the herd.

"Over the past five years I have also started on the cattle recording and monitoring, as well as handling performance data."



The family runs spring-calving suckler cows, sending stock for finishing to three local farms at 12 months old.

Holly keeps detailed records of daily liveweight gain and analyses breeding information to identify areas for improvement.

When she first started analysing the herd performance data, Holly identified that growth rates and weaning weights of calves from their Limousin cows could be improved.

"I looked into it and discovered a lot of calves seemed to be struggling for milk. I started doing some research and I came across Lincoln Reds as an alternative breed," she says.

Holly spent a year researching the native breed before the family took the plunge and bought their first Lincoln Red heifers in 2015. And they have not looked back.

With the addition of the Lincoln

Reds, Holly found that over a two-year period growth rates from grass and milk increased from 0.96kg per day to 1.04kg per day, while weaning weights increased from 282kg to 324kg.

Another benefit is the docility of the breed, something which is important to Holly as she looks to the future.

"Getting more involved with the practical aspects of the farm is my hope for the future," she says.

"The Lincoln Reds are so much calmer which has made it safer for me to get involved. At the moment, on good days, I can go outside in my wheelchair and be around the cattle – I am also useful when it comes to blocking gate ways."

Proof of their docile nature, for the first time in eight years, Holly was able to assist in a calving. But it was a Limousin's calving which gave her the chance to get the hands-on experience she had been waiting for.