

Living with CANCER

JULIA BRADBURY on coming to terms with her breast-cancer diagnosis

JULIA BRADBURY: BREAST CANCER AND ME

NEW THURSDAY, 9PM, ITV **FACTUAL**

Last September, Julia Bradbury shared the news that she had breast cancer. The presenter bravely decided to let cameras into her home to follow her story, from her diagnosis to her mastectomy surgery and recovery, for a new ITV documentary, *Julia Bradbury: Breast Cancer and Me*.

It sees the former *Countryfile* star discuss her experiences of the disease that now affects one in seven women in the UK in their lifetime, and looks at the effect the diagnosis has had on Julia's family, including her husband, Gerard, and their three children, son Zeph, 10, and seven-year-old twin daughters Xanthe and Zena.

Here, Julia, 51, tells us about how she has coped, and why she's determined to move forward with positivity...

Why did you decide to make this documentary?

I wasn't expecting to make a programme about myself; my cancer diagnosis was a real shock. But I wanted to help spread awareness about this disease, so I started keeping a video diary on my phone.

Then I spoke to a very good friend of mine, Rachel Innes-Lumsden, who also happens to be director of programmes at [television company] TwoFour.

We knew that we could make something powerful.

Have you learnt anything about yourself since your diagnosis?

It's brought everything into sharp focus. When you first hear the words, 'You have cancer,' you can't help but think about death.

I've definitely felt fear during this whole process, but with that has come a new awareness of my emotions, and the realisation that it's OK to be vulnerable. Putting on a brave face isn't the best thing in situations like this.

Are your family very supportive?

I have a really close, loving family, and three young children who are my motivation. It's something I feel incredibly grateful for.

I consider myself to be a strong, independent, positive person, but I've needed every ounce of love and support along the way.

I'm also very fortunate to have Gina, my older sister, who has



Getting treatment: Julia in hospital

always looked out for me, but this episode in our lives has certainly tested her to the max.

Has getting outdoors in nature helped?

I've always found an enormous healing and nurturing power in nature, and it's definitely been a wonderful companion for me throughout this experience.

Since my operation, even when I've been feeling incredibly tired, I've been outside every day.

Being in daylight, even on a grey, miserable, rainy day, is incredibly good for you.

Do you have advice for people going through the same thing?

There isn't a silver bullet. But focus on taking care of yourself.

I've started daily meditation, and exercise has also become even more important to me. Although I thought of myself a healthy person before this diagnosis, I realise I wasn't as healthy as I could have been. That's not to say I'm blaming myself for my cancer, but I do think our bodies are amazing, and we can take them for granted.

What are your future hopes?

I'm looking forward to seeing my children grow up. A very good friend, who sadly died of breast cancer, said, 'There isn't a single person on this Earth who can tell you the day you're going to die.' So treasure every moment and enjoy the things that are important to you.'

My children are the most precious things in my life, so every single moment I have with them is to be treasured.

*** For more information on breast cancer, please visit [nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer/)**

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Enjoying the great outdoors: Julia with her children

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**“THE TREES ARE GREENER,
SMELLS ARE SWEETER,
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Top: with her children, Zeph, 10, and twins Zena and Xanthe, 7.
Above: atop Helvellyn in the Lake District for the 2018 programme
Britain's Favourite Walks: Top 100

She has also set a lot of store by the Dutch test, which stands for “dried urine test for comprehensive hormones” and is marketed as a complete profile of sex and stress hormones. Bradbury’s test was performed in America but it is widely available in the UK through nutritionists and natural health clinics, costing about £400. Bradbury says it showed her cortisol

levels were through the roof. “My doctor in the US used the words, ‘You are running on fumes and burnout.’”

She says, “I am resilient, I know I am. Now I have to learn how to be Zen and calm. There are a whole range of supplements I’m going to start taking, including B12 and folates, which help you detoxify and help your pathways start

operating in a more effective manner. Basically, I’m out of balance.”

I couldn’t find a single UK endocrinologist who would endorse the Dutch test. But I do understand Bradbury’s instinct to research everything furiously. She comes with a file of handwritten notes, test results, annotated studies and lists of books she’s reading on food, diet and metabolism. All the information she brings — some feels like woo-woo, some at the forefront of scientific research — is incredibly important to her and she needs to be in charge.

“This is all very new and still very raw,” she says carefully. “I’m still pulling it all together, collating all the facts, working it all out.”

There’s a long pause. “There’s an element of sadness coming through now,” she continues. “I can’t change the way I’ve lived my life, but if I’d known all this information about detoxification and how your body processes all the shit stuff, I’d have been a lot more careful.”

Wonder if Bradbury’s family are worried about the pressure she’s putting herself under. She says her dad is concerned about all the tests. “He’s asked gently, ‘Is all this really helping you?’ But they are helping me decide what I need to do from here on in,” Bradbury insists.

Friends have been incredibly supportive, “sending round trays of organic food so we wouldn’t have to think about it, and soft front-opening hoodies”. She’s cut back on work and is now focusing on getting herself well. This involves more sleep — “I’ve always been a night bird” — meditation, breathwork and diligent daily exercise. She does weights and walks through Holland Park and down the Regent’s Canal because exercise reduces the risk of recurrence.

“I’m trying to garner as much information as possible to empower myself, knowing that further down the line I’ll share it,” she says. The documentary is a start; at some stage she’ll write a book. She hopes it may save a stranger’s life, but the fact-finding has also provided a mental diversion from “all the horror and sadness that goes with a breast cancer diagnosis”.

All her life she’s found comfort and stillness and calm in the outdoors, but now “the trees are greener, the smells are sweeter, the skies are more blue. Everything is magnified.” But sticking to a tough exclusion diet and driving down stress levels is a hefty responsibility if you believe your life depends on it. “It is and sometimes it feels a bit overwhelming; but I have to learn to live with this risk now without it consuming me. It’s a project and I’ll find a way to make it work.” ■

Julia Bradbury: Breast Cancer and Me
airs on Tuesday, April 26 at 9pm on ITV