

Opening up to **KATHRYN POWLEY** about her daughter's hidden illness, the dance diva admits she just didn't understand

Candy Lane

MY GIRL'S CRIPPLING DISEASE

Dancing star Candy Lane's daughter Jaz dragged herself home from school, went straight upstairs to her room, pulled the curtains against the bright summer day and fell into bed.

The 15-year-old desperately hoped the pain in her belly would stop – but Jaz knew the only real escape from the crippling agony disrupting her life was sleep.

Before Jaz was diagnosed with endometriosis, her dazzling mum and *Dancing With the Stars* co-host Candy would despair of the girl who always seemed to be lying around in the dark, avoiding life and missing school. Candy would enter the bedroom, fling open the curtains and

cheerfully say, "Let's have some fresh air in here!" But Jaz would only roll over and groan, "Nooo" – her head thumping with a migraine, her belly knotted in agony. At an age when her peers' social lives were ramping up, Jaz was more likely to be bent over in pain and come home crying.

"I regularly vomit in pain," she says. "I go to bed and sleep for hours and hours, but the pain's still there in the morning."

Now armed with knowledge of the disease afflicting her daughter, Candy can't believe what Jaz has endured since day one of her first period at age 11. Nor can she believe she was so clueless about the disease.

Endometriosis occurs when tissue normally found inside a woman's uterus starts growing on the outside. Not only can it cause terrible pain during menstrual periods, but it can also lead to infertility.

Candy says, "Jaz was always in pain, but I didn't know why. I just thought she was wagging! I didn't understand it at all because I'd never known it."

March is Endometriosis Awareness month and Candy and Jaz hope that by telling their story, more women will get checked for the debilitating disease. "It's really common," says Jaz. "Yet a lot of women don't even know about it. They just think they've got really bad period pain and are being dramatic. But it can affect your fertility."

That's a confronting topic for any teenager to deal with, and for Jaz – an aspiring midwife who wants children of her own one day – it's an awful prospect.

But knowledge is power, and Jaz has been told that her best plan is to start a family in her 20s because once she turns 25,

her chances of conceiving are likely to decrease markedly.

Endometriosis affects about one in 10 women, and Jaz urges girls and women suffering severe period pain to see their doctor immediately. "If you don't know about it, you might eventually go to your gynaecologist and say, 'I'm having trouble getting pregnant', and they'll discover you've got all this scar tissue. But by then you mightn't be able to have a baby," she says.

Jaz estimates the illness – which has unexplained causes – has forced her to miss school for one week out of every month, and ironically is the reason she stayed home on the day her class heard a lecture about the disease.

Incredibly, she had assumed her pain – which afflicts her all through the month but which is worse during her period – was normal and to be expected.

"When I was 11 at intermediate school we had camp. I thought everyone else must be in this much pain when they got their period. But I was in agony throughout all the activities. I just curled up in a little ball in my sleeping bag."

When she started high school, life got even harder. "I got quite depressed and low. I was often home crying. One of the worst times was when I was vomiting at school in the toilets from pain and the other girls could hear me."

Finally, last year, her GP referred her to an endometriosis specialist who was able to pinpoint the cause. The only sure way of diagnosing the disease is through laparoscopic surgery, and despite a morbid fear of needles and a tendency to faint when giving blood, Jaz, just 14 at the time, willingly agreed to an operation.

Sadly, the surgery to remove stray endometrial and scar tissue provided only temporary relief, and is unlikely to be Jaz's last operation. "Endometriosis is very common. They don't like doing surgery on people so young, but because it was taking me off school so often, they did. It helped for a while, but it's still quite painful. It will always be there – it will grow back and there's no cure for it."

On top of strong painkillers, Jaz now takes the Pill to limit her periods – and the pain and disruption – to once every three months.

Talking about such a personal disease doesn't faze Jaz, who says attending a girls' school has helped her cope.

"No-one's really embarrassed about anything like that at my school. I think everyone's really comfortable. It's not embarrassing. This isn't period pain, it's a disease," she says.

Candy finds it "unfair" that at an age when Jaz should be enjoying her youth she has instead sometimes been crippled by endometriosis. But she is also very proud of how well Jaz is handling her illness.

"What I've noticed mostly is Jaz's maturity," says Candy. "I always sit at the doctor's and listen while Jaz and the doctor talk – she knows so much about her condition and about her medication. I think she has had to grow up too fast." **WD**

'Jaz was always in pain, but I didn't know why,' says Candy. 'She has had to grow up too fast.'



For more information on endometriosis, go to www.nzendo.co.nz or (for teenagers), www.me.school.nz. To help support Endometriosis NZ's Big Hug fundraising appeal, visit www.sella.co.nz.

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CELEBRITY NEWS

Proud of the way Jaz, 15, is coping with her endometriosis, Candy is urging other girls who suffer chronic pain to get checked for this debilitating disease that can affect their fertility.

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PICTURES: TODD EYRE; MAKEUP: KORREEN MORRELL; STYLING: TAMMYN ELLIOTT; CLOTHES (MAIN PIC): JAZ'S SHIRT FROM JUST JEANS, JEANS FROM SUSSAN; SHOES FROM MI PIACI; JEWELLERY FROM DIVA; CANDY WEARS OWN CLOTHES; JEWELLERY FROM DIVA. (LEFT PIC): JAZ'S DRESS FROM JUST JEANS; JEANS FROM DIVA; LOCATION: BELLA VISTA.

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