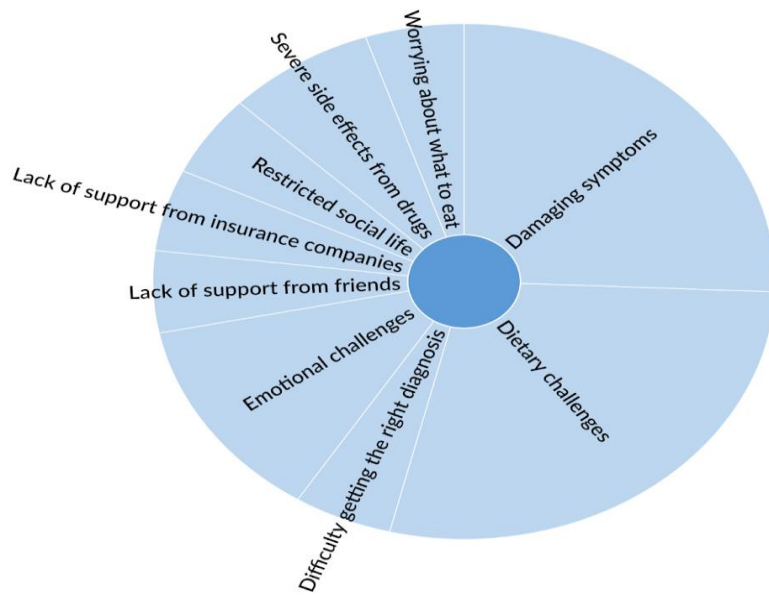


## Results

A thematic analysis of interview data was conducted using NVivo 14. The thematic analysis led to the discovery of different coping strategies and experiences of people with digestive disorders.

### Experiences Of People With Digestive Disorders

There are numerous experiences of people with digestive disorders that were clearly evident from the study including damaging symptoms, dietary challenges, lack of support from friends, restricted social life, and severe side effects.



## **Damaging Symptoms**

Damaging symptoms was a prevalent theme among the interviewed individuals with digestive disorders. The damaging symptoms among individuals with digestive disorders will include chronic fatigue.

*Fatigue, chronic fatigue, like all the, um, diarrhea, chronic diarrhea.” I’ve, you know, chronic stomach pains, intestinal pain, and things like that, um. Vision problems like floaters (Sam).*

*I’m pretty sure and, you know, chronic fatigue plays into all of that (Sam).*

*Um, and the symptoms are across the board. For me personally, um, I get, I’ll get joint pains, exhaustion, um, and I just feel incredibly full (Brenda)*

The damaging symptoms experienced by individuals with digestive disorders will therefore have an impact on their productivity throughout the day.

*I’d have a bowel movement and I’d just, I’d just be exhausted. I’d have to take a nap. I mean, literally, take a nap. Um, and, but no one, who’s to know back then? No one talked about any of this stuff so I wasn’t aware that’s what’s going on (Sam)*

## **Dietary Challenges**

Another common theme that was evident among individuals with digestive disorder is dietary challenges. The interviewees highlighted specific challenges related to deciding what to eat.

*They say it’s almost impossible to do. You have to do this diet too, to cut out all the yeast, you can’t even have carrots (Sam).*

*I don’t eat pizza anymore, unless it’s from Picasso’s because they do a great non-gluten, non-dairy pizza that tastes great (Sam).*

*It’s a little overwhelming, to be honest. You really have to look at the food labels. Are they taking out this? I still, and trying to find stuff, um, at the grocery store that I can eat, but it takes forever. I try to, at least, read every label. Grocery experiences are long [laughs]. (Brenda)*

*So, I tried vegetarian, but that means I upped my soy. A lot of soy, had a lot of grains too, even lentils, which are supposed to be really good. And I felt miserable. And I gained a lot of weight. And, they, “You know, don’t eat meat and you’ll lose weight.” For me, I felt horrible. Like, my skin was breaking out, I gained weight. I think like everyone is honestly a little bit different (Brenda).*

## **Lack of support from friends**

Another prevalent theme among individuals with digestive disorder is not getting adequate support from their friends in dealing with their condition.

That just is. But when you're, when you make a choice for your health, to eliminate something out of your diet, it's like, it really affects other people. And I had to learn that that's not my issue. Just because you want to drag me into your hell doesn't mean that, and I had to learn that, how to be strong enough, to stand up for my own health, really. And that's what it boiled down to (Sam).

They're getting much better at it, but I remember when I first started, like a year and a half ago, it was still kind of like [rolls eyes], "Oh, you're one of those people." Um, cause some people will cut out gluten because they think it will be great for them. But it really doesn't hurt them. So, I don't like to be grouped into that. It'd be cheaper. Probably be easier just to be able to go with the flow (Brenda).

### **Restricted social life**

Individuals with digestive disorders also experienced a restricted social life compared to when they did not struggle with their condition.

*Because one, I'm not drinking this. But two, because most bar food is fricking fried and it's got gluten in it. And, even if it's not fried, it's not the most healthy, you know? So, my choices are eat beforehand, meet people, sit around and talk while they eat and drink and, you know, you can still have fun. Like, I have friends that are alcoholics who, you can still have fun and, but you can't, I mean, I just gradually stopped going. Dwindling, so socially, it's like, to answer your question it's, I'll just tell you, I literally, I haven't lost friends, but I don't hang out with them as much as I used to. I mean, not nearly as much. I was out every night. Now, it's sometimes once a month(Sam).*

*Oh yeah, it was really, really tough. Kids, not so much kids, but I remember the teachers would not, being, not really getting it. And my mom would try so hard to, I mean, "Hey, this is what my daughters have. There are the type of medications, heavy medication at one point that they were on. Heavy steroids that make you, not really there. Um, she's maybe not paying attention because her pain or she's trying not to shit her pants." And, um, yeah they had a really hard time finding kids that understood what they were going through. And, it's a disease on the inside that doesn't always manifest on the outside. And I think a lot of diseases are like that. Just being aware (Brenda).*

### **Severe Side Effects from drugs**

The theme of severe side effects was also evident among individuals with digestive disorders

*And it's like, so I took the drugs. Literally, it happened Friday night until Sunday evening, I was in-, I was incapacitated. I've, I've never been, I can't call it sick, I think I was in a coma. I could, the only thing I could do was get up to pee, I couldn't even get water (Sam).*

*Yes. Well, studies have shown that if you possibly have Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis and you go on Accutane, there is research coming out that, it can set those diseases off. Um, and I just, I can't, I think that's what happened to me because of, like I said, I was completely healthy and then one day I'm having bowel issues and medications (Brenda).*

*They labeled me as having GERD and put me on severe, pretty intense medication. I just don't like the fact I have to take this medication (Brenda).*

### **Coping Strategies Of People Of Digestive Disorders**

The different coping strategies adopted by people with digestive disorders that were clearly evident from the interview data included: avoiding generalized conditions labels, eating healthy, exercising, and acceptance.

#### **Acceptance**

One of the effective strategies used by individuals with digestive disorders with their condition is acceptance. One of the interviewees describes their condition as

*Bowel disorders, it is what it is". This statement indicates acceptance of the condition that the patient experiences.*

Acceptance is also evident when another interviewee highlights that

*I have a family history, unfortunately, with inflammatory bowel disease. Both of my younger sisters have ulcerative colitis. I have an uncle who is deceased who had ulcerative colitis, and two or three second cousins that have ulcerative colitis and Crohn's*

#### **Avoiding generalized condition labels**

Another coping strategy that is evident among people with digestive disorders is a clear avoidance of generalized condition labels. It is evident that the interviewees avoid generalized condition labels as a way of coping with their condition. For example in the interview one interviewer states that

*In all intents and purposes, you could say I have that, but I don't like to use that label*

#### **Eating Healthy**

Eating healthy is also an evident coping strategy utilized by individuals with digestive disorders.

One of the interviewees states that

*Organic, I think, fits into it. If you're gluten-free you've got to watch the pesticides you're putting into your body". This statement highlights that the interviewee is aware of diet as an effective strategy to deal with their digestive disorder such as avoiding gluten and taking only organic foods.*

One of the interviewees also states that

*But if you eat stuff that promotes the good stuff to occur and helps you, help you feel better, helps you to feel more energetic and have energy to exercise, that alone and just a better outlook can push away most diseases in anyone's body, whether that's gluten or anything else.*

Another interviewee highlights that

*So for me, I follow the hunter-gatherer type, meat, fruits, and vegetables.*

#### **Exercising**

Exercising is also an effective coping strategy of individuals dealing with digestive disorders. The interviewees highlight the importance of exercise in boosting their energy levels despite their condition. In one of the interviews the interviewee highlights that

*Exercise like three, four times a week. Um, that's been the hardest one, to really stay committed. I've conquered the food part, but not putting in the exercise as well. And doing yoga 'cause I stress easily. And, that'll feed into it, that stress will lead me into making poor food choices. So, finding the balance is what I'm really focusing on*

## Code Book

### Digestive Disorders

#### Codes

Name	Description
<b>Coping strategies of people with digestive disorders</b>	These are the strategies used by individuals with digestive disorders to cope with their condition.
Acceptance	Defence mechanisms used by individuals with digestive disorders to cope with their condition.
Avoiding generalized condition labels	Patients and healthcare providers not wanting to assign a general label to a condition
Dealing with emotional origins of disease	The emotional turmoil experienced by patients with digestive disorders
Eating healthy	The need for individuals with digestive disorders to eat healthy foods
Exercising	The need for individuals with digestive disorders to be physically active

Maintaining good mental health	The need for individuals with digestive disorders to maintain good mental health
Resisting peer pressure	The pressure from friends to loosen up and not follow strict diets
Support from family	Different forms of support from loved ones
<b>Experiences of people with digestive disorders</b>	
Damaging symptoms	Debilitating symptoms among individuals with digestive disorders
Dietary challenges	The changes that individuals with digestive disorders have to adopt in their diets
Difficulty getting the right diagnosis	The struggle with misdiagnosis among people with digestive disorders
Emotional challenges	The emotional issues as result of HIV and T2D
Lack of support from friends	Individuals with digestive disorders not receiving moral support from friends
Lack of support from insurance companies	Insurance companies refusing to pay for different issues related to digestive disorders

Restricted social life	Individuals with digestive disorders struggling to socialize
Severe side effects from drugs	The side effects from various drugs to treat HIV and T2D
Worrying about what to eat	The struggle of individuals with HIV and T2D to find something safe to eat.