

“Don’t get me wrong, we have a much better life now.”

Sitting at the back of a coffee shop in Winchester waiting to interview Alex Lewis, a blonde haired woman appears around the corner who looks almost bewildered, stares at me and then disappears. Then Alex pops round the corner on his wheelchair and the young woman follows soon after, who is his carer. We happily greet each other and Alex infectiously opens up about the world of prosthetics and how it’s such an expensive business. He points to his limbs as he’s explains the types of prosthetics he’s got and plans on getting the best ones in the world.



Alex Lewis from Stockbridge, Hampshire who lives with his partner Lucy and four year - old son, Sam, has been hitting the headlines for over a year, showcasing his critical illness. In November 2013, Alex collapsed and was immediately rushed to Winchester’s Intensive Care Unit. He thought he had a cold but he actually contracted a serious form of Streptococcus A which developed into septicaemia and toxic shock syndrome. Doctors gave him a 5% chance of survival after his first three days in hospital.



After the beating the odds, Alex and his family were faced with the terrible news that his illness would leave permanent damage. Weeks later, he became a triple amputee, losing his left arm under the elbow and both legs below the knees. He even lost his lips to the deadly bacteria after spending a week in a coma. In 2014, he suffered more heartache after breaking his right arm in three places.



Now the quadruple amputee openly talks about his road to recovery, how he continues to stay positive and all the exciting things he has lined up in the year.

“We have a much better life now and we’re far happier in terms of where we are at professionally. We are happy with the one pub, rather than the two. We realized now that it’s more important spending time with each other and Sam than it was perhaps trying to run two businesses at that sort of quest for more money and more success. It doesn’t really cut it now with everything that’s happened. I think it does make you evaluate, where you really see your future and how you see it going.”

The 34 year - old says that learning to walk again after taking a 10 week course at a London Hospital was brilliant but scary. “We were always told that you probably had to use 400 per cent more effort as an amputee to walk like everybody else does.

I was very apprehensive and when I got there, it wasn’t as anywhere near as bad as I thought, nowhere near as a struggle as I thought it would be, and it came very quickly and very naturally which is fortunate for me but other people aren’t as lucky.

I was lucky that all my weight stayed off and I didn’t put any weight on when I was back at home. I ask him if he had to change his diet and he cheekily admits that his diet is dreadful.

“I have donuts for breakfast, chocolates and sweets. It’s really bad. But now that’s obviously going to have to change.”

FACTS

1. Streptococcus A – or commonly known as Strep A is a type of bacteria that is found on the surface of the skin or inside the throat.
2. Prosthetics last between five to seven years.
3. It will cost Alex £1.6m to fund his prosthetics for life.

One of the major surgeries that took place was his lip operation that took 21 hours. On May 7th he’ll return back to hospital to start the healing process. In the next four to five operations, surgeons will tweak, pull, push and scald his lips together. Towards the end they will tattoo bits and will remove skin from his shoulder, to tattoo the skin on his lips, so eventually his lips will look like how they were before.

Alex will always receive treatment at the Salisbury unit and he holds no fear going back to the operating room after going through 15 operations. “I know all the people there, the nurses, surgeons and the anaesthetists. So when I go back there it’s like seeing old mates again. It’s not often that you have complete faith in people; I think it’s quite rare that you feel like that. I have 100% faith in the Salisbury team so I knew I was in

one of the best places in the country.”

Later on this year, Channel 4 is launching a documentary about Alex’s life as an amputee. The maker of the documentary has been following Alex since June last year, on the day he broke his right arm.

This summer, Alex is going skydiving with Pilgrim Bandits, a forces charity. He’s attempting to break the world record by jumping 15,000 feet. He says, “It’s such a great opportunity. I had never ever thought I would go skydiving before I became ill. I realize now that it’s an opportunity so there’s no point saying no to it.” The event aims to get 287 people to skydive

on the same day, so anyone is more than welcome to try and break the world record.



It doesn’t end all there for Alex just yet. Next week he’ll be one of the first civilians in the UK taking part in a four day boot camp in the United States. The global boot camp located in Oklahoma invites certain amputees around the world to take part. Alex was very lucky to get invited. “I’ve been told it’s very intense and very eye opening. Hopefully it will give me a far wider insight into prosthetics and then hopefully when I get back to this country, I’ll have a better idea as to what I’ll need in the future and what is available for the cost of things. I’m really excited to see what’s available because they have all the latest technology out there.” He’s also set to visit Hanger Prosthetics which is the largest prosthetics company in the world.

But what’s so incredible about Alex is that from 17 months on, he still manages to stay positive and refuses to let anything hold him back. “My little boy and Lucy have been the two main factors for me. Lucy has been so positive about it, she hasn’t given into it, got upset with it, and she’s maintained a real stoic approach to it. Sam has soaked it up like a sponge, he’s just sees me as missing a few bits and that I’m going to be rebuilt.”

Alex proves that being an amputee isn’t the end of everything and he urges people in his position to share their problems. “I think when you’re in this situation, it’s very easy to become completely wrapped up in it on your own. It’s like you want to cocoon yourself in your new disability, whether it’s a facial disfigurement or an amputation. It’s so easy if you’re

in a private room to shut the door and pretend nothing's going on. You need to make sure that your thoughts and feelings are opened and having access to a good psychologist is key. Share the problem and don't hide away from it. Once you confront it, I think it's a lot easier to cope with."

Alex has managed to somehow put any setback behind him. With a huge support network including his family, friends and the team at Salisbury hospital, it's no wonder he has the bravery and courage to move on and embrace his new life.

By Tate Slyfield