



## I WEAR MY SUNGLASSES AT NIGHT

By Jennifer Olchoway

I have a story to tell and I hope that once you read it you will share yours with all of us. Every story is an important one as it binds us together, makes us even more compassionate towards each other and most importantly, with each story we learn from one another and try to make things better for the common good.

My name is Jennifer Olchoway and I have the privilege of volunteering on the Board of Directors of the Thyroid Foundation of Canada. For me, the reason why I sought out this Canadian Organization is because I wanted to be a part of a group of like-minded people who were passionate about talking about thyroid disease and who collectively used their voice to raise awareness, educate and empower. Not to mention, it was pretty great to find people that could relate to what I was going through.

In September of 2011, I was diagnosed with a very severe case of Graves' Disease and multi nodule goiters. I didn't really know just how severe until years later, when my Doctor wrote a letter for insurance purposes stating that in his 20 years of practice mine was one of the most severe, if not the worst case he had seen. For me, this tiny little gland, which has been characterized by shape as the oh so pretty butterfly, affected every part of my being, my body and my way of life for many years until I went into remission. For those around me, from colleagues to friends, there wasn't much being said about thyroid disease at that time, let alone Graves', so many couldn't understand just what I was going through. The oh so beautiful butterfly gland I had inside me was taking up arms and I was its number one enemy.

Hold that thought though because there is more to my story, as there often is, but I want to first note 3 things: 1) I am not a Doctor but I do know my body well enough to know when it is not working properly and what I need to do to realign myself to get back in check, 2) cliché to say, but go with your gut instincts, literally and figuratively and 3) be your own advocate, do your homework and use your voice.....always!

My journey with my thyroid was an excruciatingly painful one. When I was diagnosed and even years later, I felt guilt and shame and I felt like I had this big black X on me. I was tainted somehow and everything up until that point was all my fault. What I haven't told you yet is an additional piece to my story which, in my opinion exacerbated my recovery. In 2011, when I was diagnosed, I was employed and working for a Minister in the Federal Government. I was a political staffer and had been one since 2007. I worked many long hours and traveled a great deal so when my symptoms started revealing themselves, I didn't listen to my body because I just thought my lethargy, the weight gain, my eyes being sensitive to light, the migraines, the heart palpitations and shortness of breath, the hair and nails breaking etc, etc, were all from the 60 hours a week I worked and the lack of nutrition I was getting from my food while traveling. It wasn't until I walked into a clinic in September of 2011, that I finally realized I was in trouble. My GP gave me a doctor's note

to rest and take the week off. Unfortunately, when I was given that note to take time off, my Boss didn't let up with emails and phone calls and document writing, even though I was away from work. The second medical note was given the beginning of the next week but that too was disregarded as I was fired that Monday for insubordination and treated like I had no medical condition. I had three medical notes in total with the last coming the week later, with no work for an indefinite period of time. I will spare you the details on how that story ended because unfortunately it is still ongoing more than six years later.

With that being said, it is an important piece of my personal story. First and foremost, your thyroid truly can wreak a lot of havoc in your life from the professional side to the personal side. In addition, many people discount and disregard just how impactful a non functioning thyroid can be.

With all that I went through, here are a couple of things I learned which I hope are helpful to you: DO NOT be hard on yourself; BE compassionate with what you are facing; know that YOU are not at fault and YOU should not feel embarrassed or ashamed or feel guilty for your diagnosis; DO NOT try to mask your disease but DO embrace it and have those educational conversations with your friends and family and CHOOSE YOU!

When I was diagnosed I dove into research when I had enough energy to do it and when I was able to read books and internet articles in between my long bits of crying bouts due to my hormones being so out of sorts. I started listening to me and piecing together what my body was telling me while connecting the dots with what my body liked and what my body rejected. Though I was on Tapazole, for a couple of years, I finally went into remission because, I believe, I finally decided to listen to me and change some things in my life. I read about triggers of thyroid and Graves', endocrine disruptors from plastics and chemicals and foods that were good for your thyroid and those that weren't. From all that I read, I did a major sweep and garbage toss of makeups, shampoos and conditioners, lotions and potions, my plastic water bottles, and plastic food containers and also cut gluten, dairy and corn from my diet, as they all mimic thyroid antibodies and are natural inflammatory. The last piece of my plan was finding peace and balance and that I found on my hot yoga mat.

During this time, I've seen and lived through a great deal to get me to where I am today with my Graves'. My journey was hell and back and then some but I did find some resolve and I met a lot of kind and incredible people along the way. My plan is not your plan but it may guide you to make one if you haven't yet. As someone who is in remission with Graves', I literally take Cory Harts' advice to heart everyday no matter what when I "wear my sunglasses at night" to protect my already sensitive eyes from further damage. I get looks of disdain especially when I wear them in buildings and get snide

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comments about being a wanna-be celebrity but they don't know my story and I don't know theirs. I do what is best for me while trying to educate. Thyroid disease continues to ever grow at any age and with our stories come possibilities that just one more person will demand to get their thyroid checked by their doctor. What comes with anything in life is self doubt. Don't! YOU know YOU well enough. If you need time then take it! If you need to get a second opinion from a doctor or endocrinologist then get it! If you need to change your diet then do it! Your body is your temple and don't ever forget it. :)

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you. I hope I get to read yours next.

Jennifer



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## COMING SOON!

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**Expected launch date: June 2018**

Further development will include Members Only section with:

- Member profiles
- Thyroid Patient Forum
- Ask the Doctor

## IS THYROID DISEASE A CHRONIC DISEASE?

By Mabel Miller

Is thyroid disease a chronic disease? For quite some time, we have been asking that question of medical professionals and government officials only to be told it's not included in the list of chronic diseases. So why not?

The definition of chronic diseases is: "generally they are conditions that cannot be prevented by vaccines or cured by medication, nor do they disappear".

The Public Health Agency of Canada's list of Chronic Diseases includes heart disease, stroke, cancer, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease or other dementia, mood disorders and anxiety disorders. No mention of thyroid disease.

Well guess what? Those conditions cannot be cured nor do they disappear which is the same for thyroid disease. In the case of diabetes – it's a chronic condition that stems from the body's inability to sufficiently produce and/or properly use insulin, which the body needs to use as sugar as an energy source. Hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism stem from the body's inability to properly control how the thyroid functions.

The definition of thyroid disease is "a condition due to over- or under-functioning of the thyroid gland". The thyroid gland is an essential organ for producing thyroid hormones, which maintain body metabolism and has important roles to regulate numerous metabolic processes throughout the body.

So what's so different when looking at one being a chronic condition and another not? Diabetes is considered a chronic condition – thyroid disease is not. Both indicate something has gone wrong and is not working as it should and may never.

Again the question, "Is thyroid disease a chronic condition?" Relating to one condition, those diagnosed with Hypothyroidism will always have the condition – some may improve with time and some may get worse but there is very little hope that it will go away, be cured and not be an issue, not have to be managed.

Designating thyroid disease as a chronic condition is a challenge with the medical community and with those who define what a chronic condition is.

Anyone wishing to comment on this article is welcome to do so at [info@thyroid.ca](mailto:info@thyroid.ca).

