

MY ONGOING JOURNEY WITH HYPOTHYROIDISM

By Hanista Premachandran

My interest in volunteering with the Thyroid Foundation of Canada stems from my personal history with hypothyroidism. I was diagnosed in the seventh grade when I was 12-years old, and I never really thought much about the diagnosis or understood the disorder until years later. My story begins when my dance teacher noticed that my neck looked “swollen” and pointed it out to my mother. Following several medical appointments with my pediatrician, I was diagnosed with hypothyroidism.

The only symptom that was ever mentioned to me by my pediatrician was that I may gain weight more easily as a result of a slower metabolism, and that was all I understood about the condition. I was prescribed levothyroxine, and the medication seemed to be working well as I felt pretty normal. Throughout those early years, I never spoke about my condition to my peers because it felt odd to be so young and having to take medication. I suppose I was afraid of what they would think or say about my condition. I was not comfortable sharing details of my diagnosis until I reached my late teens, which coincided with acquiring more knowledge regarding thyroid disorders and feeling more empowered through the knowledge I gained.

Interestingly, it was not until the transition from high school to university that I started experiencing more symptoms of hypothyroidism (such as feelings of depression, hair loss, weight gain, cold sensitivity). After speaking to my doctor and running some tests, he increased my dosage and I felt better. The following year, my tests came back “normal,” but my doctor increased my dosage a bit to help me lose weight and reduce my blood sugar levels to prevent prediabetes. However, this only seemed to exacerbate my reported symptoms.

At this point in my life, I had begun graduate school, and I assumed that most of my symptoms were due to stress caused by graduate school. So, I didn’t take my symptoms too seriously. But the symptoms began to worsen, and I visited another doctor who asked me when my last change in dosage was, to which I replied, “about 10 months ago.” I was then advised to follow-up within 6-10 weeks every time my dosage changed, which came as a surprise to me. My previous doctor had advised me to come in annually, so I did not realize the importance of following-up weeks after a change in dosage. I later switched doctors and have been following up more frequently to check my TSH levels and I feel more in control with my condition.

Throughout the entire process of changing my medication several times, I felt very confused and alone, as I didn’t have any friends or colleagues who shared a similar experience. I was surprised by how drastically hypothyroidism could affect my life.

Although I was diagnosed as a pre-teen, I never understood the gravity of thyroid disorders until I experienced more of the symptomology as an adult. This was when I decided that it would be in my best interest to better understand my condition as my doctors mostly focused on only the weight gain part of the condition.

When I started looking into online resources, I came across the Thyroid Foundation of Canada during one of my initial searches and found a lot of useful information on the website. A few years later, and here I am volunteering on the board of directors as the Director of Research! Living with hypothyroidism has been and continues to be an interesting journey from which I have gained a lot of perspective. I hope to better educate myself and others on thyroid disorders in the future and I am grateful to be volunteering with such an amazing team of hardworking individuals with similar experiences!

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