

TATYANA'S THYROID JOURNEY

By Tatyana Medvedyeva

My story, much like each of yours, is slightly different and unique just to me. But I'm hoping that in sharing it, no matter my unique nuances, you will find a story that is relatable, empowering and encouraging!

Here's what I believe:

- I believe my story will be relatable for you because I know firsthand what it is like to have HYPERTHYROIDISM and I also know firsthand what it is like to have HYPOTHYROIDISM.
- I also believe that my story is unique not only because of how I developed my thyroid condition, but most importantly because I've had great medical doctors from the start who have been advising me and advocating for me to do the right treatment and it was ME that wasn't listening to them. Should I have listened to them in the beginning, the past 30 years of my life would have been drastically different!
- And because of this, I also believe my story will be empowering and encouraging for you. Just know and be encouraged that there are amazing family doctors and endocrinologists out there! And please be empowered by knowing that it is up to you to find them and partner with them for your best health – YOU are your own best advocate, just remember that!

So, let me share my story with you...and it's best to start from the beginning. My name is Tatyana, I am 40 years old and I no longer have a thyroid. A year and half ago I had a total thyroidectomy which means my whole thyroid was removed because it is the best treatment for the thyroid condition I had - a multi nodular toxic goiter.

I bet you are saying to yourself....a multi what?

A goiter refers to an enlarged thyroid gland. Sometimes, a person can have a goiter that has multiple nodules or bumps on it, which is called a multinodular goiter. A toxic goiter is one that makes too much thyroid hormone, resulting in a condition called hyperthyroidism.

How did I develop this hyperthyroidism...well, I was born in Ukraine and when I was 6 years old, in the early morning hours of April 26, 1986, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, creating what is considered the worst nuclear disaster the world has ever seen. The result was a massive radiation leak that exposed most of Europe to long-term health impacts.

You see the type of radiation released is rapidly ingested through the air and tends to localize in the thyroid gland. Within 3 months people were dying, getting sick and everyone was mandated to take iodine pills. Children and youth were impacted the most - by the early 2000s, as many as 20,000 thyroid cases were diagnosed in patients who were under the age of 18 in 1986.

Me? Well, for someone who never got sick, I was now constantly unwell...fast forward 6 years and I was now 12 years old. I had large bumps on my neck, I was super skinny, super hyper, my moods were all over the place, I had insomnia, my hair was short, thin and fragile and I just could not tolerate heat!

The doctors were telling my mom I need my thyroid removed because I now had 3 nodules and each of them was pumping out thyroid hormones. But because we were immigrating to Canada, my parents decided that a new change of hemisphere and its environment and first world medical care would be much better for me, therefore we should pause the removal for now and reassess after a few years in Canada.

My thyroid was monitored every few months and the nodules stopped growing, biopsies came back as inconclusive and my thyroid levels were in range. Meanwhile, I still had all the hyperthyroidism symptoms I mentioned before. Difference was... this had now become the norm, that's who I was and I and everyone around me didn't know a different Tatyana. So, when Canadian doctors were now recommending thyroid removal, and I was now a teenager with my own voice – I vocally declined!

Thank goodness for my doctors sticking with me – they got me to agree to continue monitoring every 6 months and if something changed we would reopen the conversation. Guess what, this continued until I was 35 years old and I couldn't get pregnant. But shockingly I still refused any kind of thyroid treatment. Then I had some fertility treatments and I finally gave birth to a healthy amazing human at the age of 37.

But here's where the story changes....it was a very difficult childbirth with many treatments and complications taking a BIG toll on my thyroid. The nodules remained the same in size but the thyroid levels were now through the roof to the point that my heart beat was 140 beats in a sitting position. This was when I finally started listening to my endocrinologist – my treatment: complete thyroid removal but before that I was placed on antithyroid pills to lower my levels and beta blockers to lower my heart beat as these needed to be stabilized before surgery. This alone started to improve my everyday life!

My thyroid removal surgery went as planned, I took a daily dose of Synthroid thyroid hormone every morning and for the first month I thought this was the best thing ever because I felt great....and then the HYPOTHYROIDISM hit me...and for someone who had been hyper all her life, I literally thought I was dying. I was freezing all the time, my brain was foggy, I gained a lot of weight and my whole body felt like melted rubber – I just couldn't move.

The difference this time was that I had learned my lesson – I was no longer pretending that is normal and I really partnered with my doctor to get me help. I learned that it usually takes about 6 months to a year to normalize your new thyroid levels post removal, but with the help of my doctor we stabilized me in 5 months via a tailored plan just for me – I take 2 different doses a week vs just the typical 1 dose every day, I am kept on a slightly higher end of the range to mimic my previous energy level and I have a very strict morning diet and afternoon supplements plan. It has been a year since that took place and I am a whole new balanced human being!

My hair and skin completely changed for the better, I don't have mood swings, my weight stabilized and I now have normal thermal body regulation.

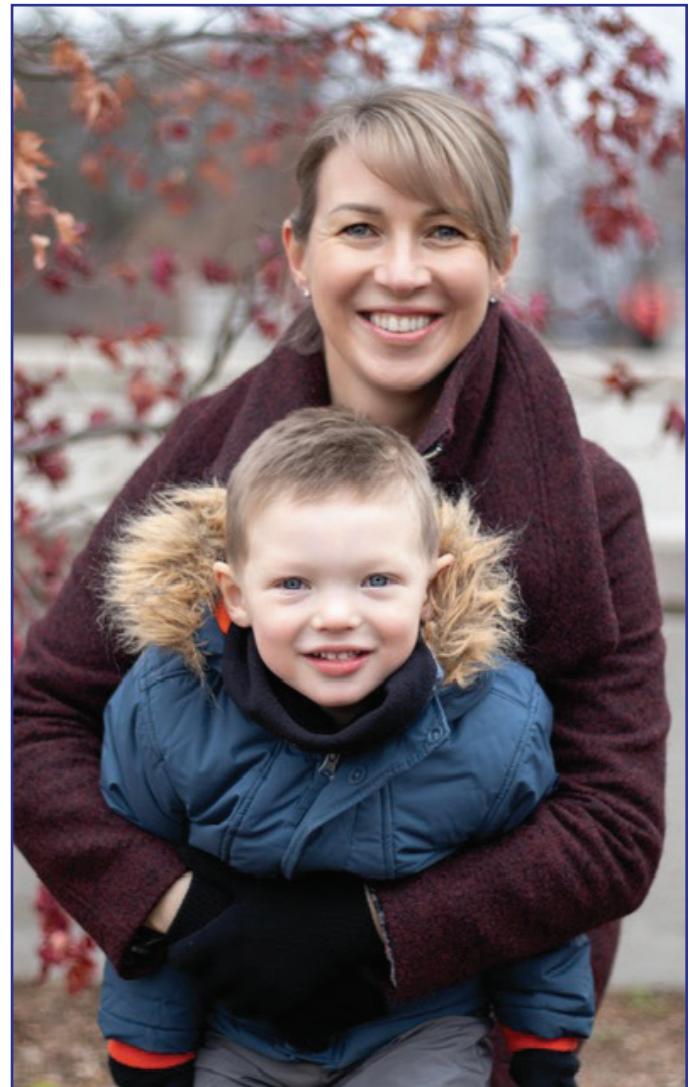
Hindsight is 20/20, but I really should have listened to those doctors back in Ukraine when I was 12 years old. I would have had a completely different life!

And this is my message to you...if you don't feel well – don't normalize that in your head. If you are not feeling heard – keep searching for the right providers. But also ask yourself are those providers telling me what I don't want to hear – because that was the case with me. I thought I wasn't being heard, but in reality it was me that wasn't listening – my providers were right all along, I just had to partner with them to find a solution that I was comfortable with.

Because of this personal trajectory I decided to volunteer for the Thyroid Foundation of Canada and become a thyroid health advocate!

And here's the end of my story. I wish each of you a similar positive outcome. Feel free to ask me any questions; I'm here to support! Thank you!

Tatyana Medvedyeva is TFC's Director of Public Relations



Tatyana and Luka



Do you have a thyroid story you would like to share with others?

Send your 500-1,000 word story with a couple of photos to: info@thyroid.ca