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Living With the Enemy

Imagine getting a full night sleep and not being able to get out of bed in the morning or gaining over forty pounds in less than a year all whilst working out and living a healthy lifestyle. This is a daily reality for my mom and 14 million other Americans fighting the chronic autoimmune disorder of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis. This disease occurs when a person’s immune system attacks their body’s own tissues, causing the thyroid to under produce hormones the body needs. The thyroid isn’t just a little neck gland; it’s responsible for controlling your metabolism and heart rate. This disease can encompass and take over your life if it isn’t treated. One day you’re healthy then suddenly you’re a different person, struggling to carry out daily activities. They say this disease is “the enemy,” and most carriers agree.

**Symptoms**

Known symptoms of Hashimoto’s disease are weight gain, fatigue, inability to get warm, and hair loss; all of which my mom endured.

In 2013 my mom began this health kick. She was nowhere near fat, but she was determined to lose weight and become confident in herself again. She pushed herself for a whole year; walking over 20 miles a week and eating clean everyday. She felt the best she had since having my brother and I over 20 years ago, but over the course of the next few years it was like her body flipped a switch and everything changed. She noticed her body was fighting against itself and no matter what she did she couldn’t figure out what was happening. She would stare blankly at her computer screen at work, forgetting what she was supposed to do. She would drive and forget where she was going. Her eyebrows started to slowly fall out, her fingertips were always cold, even in the Florida heat, and her skin was constantly dry. She knew things weren’t right, but she didn’t know how she could be so healthy but still so sick.

**Causes**

There is no exact cause of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, and doctors don’t know why sometimes the immune system fights the body rather then protecting it. But, scientists have discovered a few factors that could play into this disease. One of the main factors that make a person susceptible to developing this is having a pre-existing autoimmune condition. This is due to the fact that your immune system is already malfunctioning in some other way.

When my mom went to the doctor to see what was wrong, they had labs drawn on her to check everything out. The lab results said that not only did she have hypothyroidism and a vitamin b deficiency; she also had Hashimoto’s thyroiditis. Overwhelmed at the large medical terminology and uneducated on the disease, she went online and found out everything she could. She discovered it was common to have these two diseases together as having one autoimmune disease can lead to having more. In fact, she found out that Hashimoto’s is the most common autoimmune disease and luckily she caught it early enough to treat, even though she will be treating it for the rest of her life.

Genetics is also known to be a leading cause of Hashimoto’s disease. My mom had never heard of this disease in our family, let alone heard about the disease ever, but she wanted to know if anybody else had experienced this before. After reaching out to family members she discovered that her aunt on her mom’s side and her uncle on her dad’s side both have it. Everything was finally starting to come together and make sense.

**Treatments**

Because Hashimoto’s disease causes thyroid hormone deficiency, many affected need replacement therapy hormones. The most popular synthetic hormone given is levothyroxine, a daily pill. Synthetic levothyroxine is identical to thyroxine, the natural version of the hormone made by the thyroid gland. Although it is an easy fix, it is still a pill that carriers have to take everyday for the rest of their lives.

My mom along with the other 14 million Americans fighting this disease have to have checkups every 3-6 months with a doctor to ensure they are receiving the correct dosage. During these checkups, doctors take blood samples and test the levels of thyroid-stimulating hormones, thus figuring out how much of the synthetic hormone you need to live a full life. Although this is to make you feel healthier, there are common side effects such as headaches, insomnia, and irritability. This is just another thing carriers have to deal with on a daily basis.

My mom, now 47 years old, has been fighting this never-ending battle for four years and she will continue to fight it forever. Each individual is affected in a different way, all the more challenging for family, friends, and even doctors who are there to hold the hand of their loved one every step of the way. It’s not easy knowing your immune system is killing your thyroid, especially when your immune system is what’s supposed to keep you alive and healthy. Hashimoto’s thyroiditis not only affects the carriers, but it affects everyone around that person. It takes an army of support and encouragement to get through the days; good and bad.

“Living with Hashimoto’s disease can be a heavy burden to carry, so please, carry it with us.”

References

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