

Lupus - Debra's Story

Hi my name is Debra Fleming & I was diagnosed with Lupus early 2000 at the age of 25 & this is my story.

My whole life changed in November 1999 when I went to my GP complaining of a sore calf muscle, which turned out to be a DVT. I was admitted to hospital & had clexane injections twice per day. It could not have happened at a worse time, as I was working full time & also studying for a Diploma in Survey Drafting at TAFE. I was released from hospital to attend my final exams at Tighes Hill TAFE & then return back to hospital at Singleton that night.

After 10 days in hospital & now on daily warfarin tablets, which meant a blood test every week, I started to notice that my fingers & toes were going purple, so I was referred to Dr Mark Walsh who was a haematologist. He sent me off for heaps of blood tests & scans, which revealed that I had Lupus, being Mixed Connective Tissue Disorder, Arthritis, Raynauds Phenomenon & Factor V Leidens Mutation.

I was then referred to a Rheumatologist & then to Professor Robert Clancy in 2001. At this stage I was taking Prednisone, Plaquenil & Aspirin every day to manage my symptoms.

Late 2002 my muscles started to become weak & I had problems walking. I couldn't run or bend down to pick something up off the floor, so I was prescribed Imuran (Immune suppressant) & not long after that most of my hair fell out.

In 2004 I found out I was pregnant with our first child & was put under the care of the high risk pregnancy unit at the John Hunter Hospital. With expert advice from Professor William Walters, Professor Robert Clancy, Dr Mark Walsh & Dr Theo De Malmanche, Lachlan was born in May 2005 weighing 4 lb. 11 oz. Then to follow in October 2006 was Jessica weighing 5 lb. 12 oz.

During the course of Lupus I have suffered several flares & the biggest problems that affect me are Raynauds, Arthritis in the wrists and tiredness. Looking back, prior to having a DVT, there may have been some early warning signs; at high school my nick name was "Radish" because my cheeks were always red. From 1997 I had dry red patches on my skin at various times, my eyes would go red & I would get stiff joints.

Late last year Prof Clancy has taken me off Imuran & I am now on Mycophenolate & I can not believe how much it has changed my life for the better. I call it the wonder drug. I am now not as tired, my blood levels are back to normal and I have more energy to keep up with the kids. I know it is expensive, but if it has given me the freedom to live a normal life, then it is worth every cent.

Since being diagnosed with Lupus, yes it has changed my life & I have had to endure more than your average person, but I believe I am a stronger person for it.

I have a wonderful supportive family network, being my husband Gareth, Mum & Dad, sister Trish & two beautiful children Lachlan & Jess who are all the love of my life.

Today, I have a pretty normal life, I work 3 days a week, go to aqua aerobics 2 nights per week, have a 2 acre property, love gardening, horses, & look after 4 chooks, a pony & a fish.

My experience you are not alone and there are people out there that can help.

Many thanks to Debra for sharing your story.