

Jacqueline Ploudre

SARCOIDOSIS



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Five years ago, while vacuuming I experienced a severe chest pain unlike anything I'd ever felt before. I instantly knew something was wrong. I saw my primary care physician the next morning, and after some tests that evening I received word that they had found granulomas, or nodules, in my lungs behind my thyroid and pancreas.

X-rays would suggest lymphoma or sarcoidosis. My first thought was, Oh my God I have cancer, and I'm going to die. Three months of tests and a lung biopsy later, it was confirmed that I had pulmonary sarcoidosis.

The disease hit me like a ton of bricks. For eight months my life consisted of work and bed. I had a chest pain that literally felt like cinder blocks were being dropped on my chest. A shortness of breath would only allow me to walk a short distance, and now that I have breathing issues, I have panic attacks when I'm in situations that compromise my space and air.

I became depressed and withdrew from my daily activities. I was put on anti-depressants and a steroid. The weight gain, hair loss, lack of sleep, and moodiness, wore me down.

As a wife and mother of two young boys I needed to take back my life. At the recommendation of the St. Louis City health commissioner, I met with a close friend who practiced holistic medicine. I got off the drugs and tried the holistic route. I also became gluten free, cut pork from my diet, increased fruits, vegetables and water intake, and I started walking. Finally, I was beginning to feel better and have not allowed myself to mentally go back down that road.

Regardless of how sick I feel, I remain upbeat.

Since I have sarcoidosis I always hear "You don't look sick." People think you are faking illness or just enjoy complaining. What they really don't realize is we are actually faking being well, and this takes real talent when deep down you really feel like hell.

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Sarcoidosis is an inflammatory disease that most commonly involves the lungs but can impact any organ in the body including the eyes, nervous system, liver and heart. For some patients, the disease is mild and for others it may be progressive and devastating. The cause of sarcoidosis remains unknown. However, experts suspect that sarcoidosis develops when a patient's immune system overreacts to some type of exposure—occupational, environmental or infectious—and small clumps of inflammatory cells called granulomas are formed and deposited in affected organs.

Learn more from ATS Public Advisory Roundtable member the Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research. stopsarcoidosis.org

This disease needs to get on the radar. We need help, we need awareness, we need research, we need better medicines, we need easier conclusive testing. We need sarcoidosis clinics and doctors that understand the disease. We need a community fighting for cures with the same tenacity that we, as patients, lead our lives.

There are sarcoidosis warriors out there, and in spite of our illness we are fiercely working to make life more bearable for all who suffer from this disease.