

living with HEPATITIS C

a series of stories written
about people living with
hepatitis C

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I didn't know I put myself at risk for hepatitis C when I wanted my tattoo. When I went for a physical 3 years ago my liver enzymes came back high. They tested me for everything, but hepatitis C was not coming up. I was also diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome. I started a medication for that, which made me so sick. When I went to the doctor about that it turned out that my liver enzymes skyrocketed to really abnormal numbers. Hep C still wasn't coming up, so I was referred to a liver specialist. I went for blood tests every couple of months and it kept coming back negative for Hep. C. Late 2005 the next step was a liver biopsy to find out what was going on. The biopsy showed inflammation, but still no Hep C. I took one more blood test after the biopsy and bingo ... November 2005 I was positive for HCV. I didn't know anything about it so didn't know what to think except feeling like my life was over. I was only 27 years old and thought I would not reach 30.

I talked to my doctor about what the

next steps were. He told me about my treatment options. I was on board! I first had to make sure all my hepatitis vaccinations were up to date. I needed one sequence which had to be taken 6 months apart. So I started that in January 2006. In June 2006 I was ready to start treatment. I was going to wait until I came back from vacation, but I had to cancel my trip due to a family emergency, so I started the treatment right away.

It was late July 2006 and I was ready to commit to getting myself better. I remember taking my first ribivarin pill and knowing that this is the start of a new life for me. I had help with my first pegylated interferon shot. I scheduled my shots for Friday nights just in case I got sick afterwards. I was nervous and scared. That first night I had a fever and just felt very tired and weak. But the end of the next day I was ok. The next week was the same. I thought I was going to go through with flying colors. I started planning things on the weekend, only to find out that I shouldn't have. I pushed

myself too much. I was feeling so good that I must've forgotten what I was going through ... what my body was going through. From then on I realized I had to take care of myself and just accept the fact that in the next year I would not be the same person. The first doctor's appointment after starting treatment went very well. My liver enzymes were already back to normal. I felt so happy. 12 weeks into treatment they checked my viral count and it was undetectable. I knew I was going to make it through this.

The first half of the treatment wasn't as bad as it could've been. Some of the regular symptoms that occurred for me were: headaches, fever, nausea, periodic numbness/tingling in the arms and legs, and loss of hair. I just tried to pace myself with everything. I continued to work, which had its good days and bad days. I had some overtime at times which really tired me out, but my boss knew about my situation and tried to work with me, or so I thought. In January 2007 I started to feel a bit worse. Extremely tired and weak, dizzy, continued to get nauseated and vomit on a regular basis, developed anemia and hypothyroidism. I was getting very depressed and moody as well. Insomnia hit me as well. My doctor prescribed medication for my depression and for my insomnia. My job was getting too demanding for me to handle, but instead of coming forward and letting them know I couldn't handle it, they forced me to go on disability. My doctor strongly suggested it as well. They noticed how unhappy I was and how tired I'd become and knew this was the best thing for me to complete my treatment.

I finished treatment the end of June 2007. At that time, the virus was still undetectable. I go back in December for my 6 month


evaluation. If it's still undetectable, then I can celebrate surviving hepatitis C.

Going through any kind of treatment like this will get to you emotionally, not only physically. I was trying to keep positive, but sometimes you just can't fight it. But one day I woke up and realized how much I had going for me. I was in control of this disease and not the other way around. And I was able to handle the rest of the treatment much better after that. For anyone who has just been diagnosed, know that you are not alone. There is help out there and you can get better. Having people around you to motivate and support you are the key.

Be Sure to check out all our other stories at: <http://www.hcvadvocate.org/community/stories.asp>

For more information about hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HCV coinfections, please visit www.hcvadvocate.org.

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 A publication of the Hepatitis C Support Project

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