

# 'I've got my life back!'

Plagued with numerous health issues and weight struggles for well over two decades, 51-year-old Bev Battye's life changed when she discovered a naturopath-based weight loss program on line...

Ever since I was 18 years old I've been on a diet, but funnily enough I wasn't even fat then. I just went on them because that was the thing that everybody did! We were nine stone, we were eight stone, but we were on diets because we were 'too fat'. I actually managed to get down to a child size 16. I was in great health back then - I used to play hockey and netball, I was a size 10 and I had a pretty healthy diet.

But then I went to Penang for a holiday in 1985 and my life changed forever. I came back feeling really sick. I was always incredibly tired, I had rotten headaches, I was feverish, swollen and had heart palpitations. Within 12 months, my weight ballooned to 16 stone. I had numerous visits to the doctors with nil results. I had ECGs, blood tests... and each doctor basically treated me like I was crazy and there was nothing wrong. Eventually when they got sick of me, they said, 'Oh it must be early menopause.' I was 26 years old.

The years went on and still nobody knew what was wrong. My symptoms continued to grow and I just did my best to try to cope with them. I was extremely sensitive to cold, so I had to wear thermal underwear under my clothing at night because my bones would ache from the cold. I started wearing magnetic bracelets to help with my stiff, sore wrists. I used cream to treat my psoriasis and dry skin.

Then I was in a serious motor vehicle accident which left me permanently disabled with a right hemiplegia (paralysis). I was in hospital for many months and during that time they fed me a milk-based food through a tube. I came out of hospital another four stone bigger. By this time, my self-esteem was at an all-time low. I'd gone from having good jobs to being virtually unemployable because of my disability. I felt worthless and looked like the Michelin Man to top it off. Because of my paralysis, for the first three months I was in hospital I could barely move, which meant that I had trouble with lymph oedema. I'd also always get whatever illness anybody else had. If they had a cold, I'd get it and it would turn into a throat

infection and a month long saga. My immune system was completely shot, but at that point, I still didn't know why.

It was 19 years and seven months before they diagnosed me and that was completely by accident. My doctor was on holidays so I went to see another doctor in the practice. He took one look at the red rash on my face and said to me, 'Have you got lupus?' I could only reply, 'What's that?' He said to me, 'I think you'd better go down so we can do some tests.'

Sure enough, I was finally diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus, a chronic autoimmune connective tissue disease that can affect any part of the body and which finally explained all my mysterious symptoms. I was put on the anti-malarial drug plaquenil, which I took for about 16 months. It seemed to help at first -- my lupus flares weren't as severe but I was still having them.



## What is lupus?

Lupus is an autoimmune disease and can be triggered by:

- Hormones (females between the age of 15 and 45 are most commonly affected)
- Certain medications
- Dietary factors
- Viruses and bacteria
- Stress
- Genetics
- Pregnancy
- Exposure to UV light

## Who is most often affected?

Although lupus can affect anybody, 90% of lupus patients are women. Of these, 90% develop the condition during their reproductive years.

## Some signs and symptoms of lupus

- Fatigue, weakness and lethargy
- Joint pain or swelling (experienced by about half of patients)
- Skin rashes (around one in five patients)
- Anaemia
- Hair Loss
- Fever
- Depression, seizures and visual disturbances

Lupus is not an easy condition to diagnose. Symptoms are often similar to other illnesses and tend to come and go.

## Common food culprits

Foods that lupus patients should avoid are peanuts, soybeans, spinach and sulfur-containing veggies including cabbage, brussels sprouts, broccoli, kale and cauliflower.

Then suddenly I developed eczema, which I'd never had before. It spread quickly, from the tops of my arms to the tips of my fingers. Then it started on my legs, on my thighs, on my stomach...The rest of my lupus symptoms I'd learnt to live with over the 20 years, but this eczema turned out to be pretty revolting. I could never wear a short sleeved top as people would look at me as if I had leprosy!

I realised that the eczema had only started when I was taking the plaquenil, so I discussed it with my rheumatologist and stopped taking the drug. My lupus didn't seem to be getting any worse after I stopped the drug and I was resigned to battling on as before.

Around this time I finally got a computer and with the wonderful invention of the internet I started trying to get some answers.

It was while I was searching for weight loss methods on the Internet that I came across Mass Attack and chatted with Narelle Stegehuis. I had to fill in an extensive on-line questionnaire about my symptoms and problems and then they tailored a diet especially for me. I thought, 'wow, this seems like a good idea'. Often you'll go to the doctor and they'll tell you what is good for everybody else, but they don't deal with you as an individual. With Mass Attack, you send them your medical stuff and they go through it and they do something to suit you, not the person next door. They came back with a plan, which listed the foods I should eat the most, foods I could eat moderately and foods I should eat least, as well as a range of nutrients for me to take.

Within just a couple of weeks I was feeling better - I still had my symptoms, but not nearly as bad. By the time four months had passed, my inflammation was going down like a slow leak in a balloon, which was making a huge difference. While the 10 kilos I lost was great, even more dramatic was the huge improvement to my inflammation and overall health. As for my lupus, I've just been for my yearly checkup there and to my amazement, my lupus is virtually

inactive. I've had no more hospital stays, which has been wonderful, and my eczema has all but cleared up now except for a couple of dry patches on my elbows.

Health-wise my friends have noticed the difference. My mother who I speak to a lot on the phone, has noticed a difference even in the sound of my voice! She says I sound happier and more well and she can ring up now and I'll say 'I'm feeling really good!' whereas before she'd ring up and I'd have to go and have a sleep because I was so tired. I went through a stage where I could only stay awake for two hours. So she's noticed a big difference. My husband has noticed as well, we went through a stage last year where he was the one that was sick and I was the one that was pretty well, that's the first time that's ever happened! I'm much more able to live a fuller life now and my self esteem has increased dramatically. Now I'll put makeup on and worry about the clothes I wear, girl things, whereas for a while there I was just too sick to care. It feels like I've been given a new lease on life.

By Bev Battye, Yengarie QLD

Narelle Stegehuis runs MassAttack and Bump Fertility. She is a naturopath specialising in women's health, fertility and weight loss.

Call 1300 133 536 or visit her websites:

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