

'I'm a whole new person!'

For 59-year-old Val Pope from Port Lincoln, SA, life with a thyroid condition had left her fat, unhappy and exhausted. But her life was transformed when she discovered an amazing new weight loss program...

I've been overweight probably for most of my adult life. Not excessively, but it was always a battle. I love my food and I'm an emotional eater too – I'd cope with stress or boredom by turning to food. It was just how I'd deal with life. Comfort food, that's what I was all about.

But strangely enough, my health problems really started when I began losing weight. I should have been happy about it, but I knew it was a sign that something wasn't right. I had a host of other health issues too, so eventually I saw a doctor.

'You have an overactive thyroid,' I was told by the doctors. 'To get rid of your symptoms, we need to make your thyroid underactive.'

Of course, if I'd known then what I know now, I would have asked them if there was another way they could have treated it. I had no idea of all the issues and problems that were to come.

They gave me radioiodine treatment, which basically destroys your thyroid gland. They should have followed this up with giving me thyroxine

tablets, but they didn't do that until it was too late. The end result was that instead of having an overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism), I ended up with an underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism).

To put it in simple terms, it meant that I had turned into a big blob. When you have an underactive thyroid your metabolic rate slows right down. I became fat and lazy and basically couldn't move. My weight ballooned to 95kg and I felt dissatisfied with the way I looked – but even worse was the way I felt. I just felt totally yuck - tired, exhausted and miserable. Depression would come on easily and my moods were all over the place – I was so emotional.

I mean, I'm a pretty together person – I have a great relationship with my husband and a great family network with my four kids, but everyday life throws things at you and I was just unable to deal with them. My daughter's marriage fell apart after 18 months, we had a financial issue that we had to deal with – both were horrible experiences, but what was even more horrible was my complete inability to cope with them. We realised then that I really needed help.

During my struggles, I came across

a thyroid support group, which gives all thyroid sufferers access to professionals who can help them with various problems. They also had a newsletter which was quite informative. It was while I was reading one of these newsletters, that I came across an article that stopped me in my tracks. In it, they discussed in depth the link between weight gain and an underactive thyroid. I had always suspected that this was the case, but this was the first time I'd ever read anything that confirmed it. The article mentioned a naturopathy company called Mass Attack, run by Narelle Stegehuis, that worked at dealing with those issues.

'If a medical profession organisation is promoting a naturopath-based treatment, it must be pretty good', I thought. Everything that Mass Attack was saying made so much sense and it really made me stand up and take notice



Is your thyroid gland the culprit?

It is difficult for some patients to find a health professional that is willing to test thoroughly and then explain their condition clearly. Thyroid related illnesses have a variety of causes, and sometimes the problem is not with the thyroid gland itself. Whatever the cause, symptoms will appear.

Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism (under active thyroid) is the most common thyroid disorder and usually strikes after age 40. It is more common on women than in men, and affects 6% to 10% of women over the age of 65. The signs and symptoms of an underactive thyroid are:

- low energy
- slow heart rate
- cold intolerance
- muscle fatigue
- constipation
- depression
- weight gain
- dry skin
- hair loss
- goitre

The most common cause of Hypothyroidism is an autoimmune condition called Hashimoto's Thyroiditis in which antibodies and white blood cells attack the thyroid.

Some foods to avoid: goitrogenic foods including broccoli, cauliflower and sprouts.

Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid) affects approximately 2% of women and 0.2% of men. The signs and symptoms of an overactive thyroid are:

- irritability
- rapid heart rate
- weight loss
- sleeplessness
- heat intolerance
- diarrhoea

The most common cause of Hyperthyroidism is an autoimmune condition called Graves' disease in which antibodies stimulate the thyroid uncontrollably.

Some foods to avoid: shellfish and iodine rich foods.

of them. It was an awesome moment. Realising there was a link between my weight and my thyroid condition made everything fall into place. It blew me away.

I went onto the Mass Attack website right away and filled out their online survey, listing all my symptoms and problems. From that, I received a very detailed rundown on what was going on in my body and why I was feeling the way I did. I was given a list of green, yellow and red colour-coded foods – green which I should eat most of, yellow which I could eat moderately and red which I should eat least – as well as a list of nutrients I needed to take.

As soon as I started taking the nutrients the weight began to fall off. Over a couple of years my weight has dropped from 95kg to 80kg and I've gone from a dress size of 18-20 to about a size 14. In fact, I bought a size 12 skirt recently! But while the weight loss has been fantastic, what I'm even more thrilled about is how fantastic I feel.

I'm just so much happier and more energetic. My overall outlook and the way I deal with stuff has been transformed. We've had a really tough time this last six months looking after a friend with cancer who has just passed away. It's been incredibly hard, but I've realised just how well I've been coping – two years ago I would have fallen apart. There's just no comparison. My well-being is even better than it was before I had any thyroid conditions.

The information and knowledge Mass Attack gives you about how your body works is invaluable. Just to have someone who's available on the phone at any time, who knows what I'm dealing with and how to deal with it - it's fantastic. And if you have any hiccups along the way, you can go back and talk to them. In fact, sometimes they ring me up! I'll come home to a message saying, 'Oh, I haven't heard from you in a while, thought I'd have a chat'... That's just awesome – it gets you motivated and back on track.

With my newfound energy, I'm now going to the gym regularly which has been vital for getting my metabolic rate up. I do classes, cardio, balls, weights, the whole range.

Many people have commented on how great I'm looking, which feels great. My friends say, 'Whatever you're doing, it's obviously working!' Even my hair has improved – people with over or under-active thyroids can often experience hair loss, and my locks were looking limp, lifeless and yuck. But when I was at the hair salon the other day, my hairdresser was blown away. 'Your hair is looking great!' she said – and that was before she started cutting it!

That's why I'm so happy to tell people about Mass Attack, because I'm so thrilled about what it's done to my wellbeing. I'm excited about the program. It's worked for me and it's worth anybody working with it. I can only suggest it to people and hope they get as much out of it as I have.

By Val Pope, Port Lincoln, SA

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:

www.massattack.com.au

www.bumpfertility.com.au