

My journey with Graves' Disease was definitely not linear; there were high's, lows, and everything in between. Let me take you back to the Spring of 2012; I had an active life of dance, music, and soccer and was going to start high school the next school year. My first signs of having anything wrong with me was getting a diagnosis of **Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)** around March/April 2012. As this did not affect how I live my life, everything just continued on like nothing happened: started high school and kept my busy extracurricular activity schedule. A big highlight at this point was band trip to Honolulu, Hawaii in April 2013. On the outside, it looked like I had a "typical" high school experience, but I started to feel progressively unwell as I progressed through my Grade 9 year.

My symptoms started to become more prominent, and I was struggling to even function. I was starting to lose my concentration, appetite significantly increased, I was losing weight, kept falling asleep in class, and I had troubles sleeping at night. By the summer time, I was starting to get very uncoordinated, muscles were weak, tremors, constantly short of breath, my menstrual cycles were irregular, and experienced diarrhea. I noticed my symptoms were starting to hinder my life when I was on a vacation to California the summer of 2013; we were at Disneyland and I was constantly looking for somewhere to sit as my legs got so tired, sore, and weak after an hour of walking. By the winter, I was experiencing a fast heart rate, nausea & vomiting, a goitre, bulging eyes, chest pains, and seizures. My health got so bad that I was on the verge of failing Grade 10.

While on a vacation in Toronto, Ontario to see family for Christmas and New Years, my aunt noticed a difference in me since we last saw each other. She told my mom that I was eating a lot more and looked like I lost quite a bit of weight and suggested that I get checked out. At the beginning of 2014, one appointment with my family doctor changed my life forever; she probably noticed my flushed skin, fast heart rate, and blood pressure, which raised a few alarm bells. After initial testing, and an urgent visit with my pediatrician, I got the initial diagnosis of **hyperthyroidism** on January 30th, 2014. I was immediately put on methimazole (15mg three

times a day), while I underwent further tests to find the underlying cause of why my thyroid numbers were through the roof.

While I waited for the latest tests and had a ban from exercising (i.e. no dance classes, physical education class at school, and soccer practices/games), I got progressively worse, despite starting medication. My mom saw me fall down and experience what looked like a seizure, which got her worried. I went back to school on the Monday (February 3rd, 2014), like any other normal teenager did. What I was not aware was that my pediatrician phoned my mom about my recent blood work, in addition to discuss about my recent seizure activity. From what I was told, my pediatrician told my mom to run, don't walk to get me from school and take her to the hospital, I'll phone them to let them know that you're on the way. Once my mom and I got to the Emergency Room at the local hospital at around 11:30am, everything was a blur from then on out with what happened with me. Once I was admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit by 5pm, the harsh reality of the severity of my condition hit me like bombshell. The words "**Thyroid Storm**" finally sunk in and I got scared out of my mind. It was confirmed that I had **Graves' Disease**, after further blood tests and imaging to rule out any permanent damage to vital organs and my brain.

Once I was discharged from hospital after a total of 5 nights, I began the long journey of recovery and learning about what my illness entails. My pediatric endocrinologist, who was absolutely amazing, was able to fully explain to me what Graves' Disease is in a language that I could understand. I did not take the news lightly that I had an autoimmune disease; my life before diagnosis was gone. Once I got stable and got my strength back up, my life only went up from there. After much hard work with many accomplishments and tears, I was able to graduate high school with honours and be a class valedictorian. A few years after starting college. I reconnected with my GP and started seeing to a new endocrinologist when I aged out of my pediatric team (June 2019). At first, my new endocrinologist tried to push for Radioactive Iodine Treatment, but I needed more time to think about my options and what I want to do in my future.

I continued my life with college; I was set to start the BSN Nursing Program in September 2019. With the intensity of the program, combined with the COVID-19 lockdown, my mental health went downhill to the point where my safety started get very questionable. I was forced to withdraw from the nursing program in June 2022 due to the severity of everything going on. By the end of 2022, my thyroid numbers were constantly fluctuating every 6 months, my mood was never predictable, and I was getting quite frustrated with my health. It was at that point where the Radioactive Iodine Treatment was reconsidered. Despite my fears and anxiety, I went ahead with the Radioactive Iodine Treatment, which happened in late October 2023. I didn't find the treatment that bad; it was just the isolation afterwards the worst part. The most annoying part I found was I got the RAI treatment right in the middle of the school semester, so I had to coordinate due dates and possible exam deferrals.

Fast forward to present day (as of April 2026), my life has been a rollercoaster of a ride, but I am doing much better, now that I have shifted my life to accommodate my health flares, both physically and mentally. I'm officially going to be earning my Bachelor's of Science Degree in Psychology in June 2027. Looking back, if anyone would ask me: "Do you wish to have all of your health problems go away for good?", I will say no. There were some repercussions that happened because of my diagnosis, including Medical PTSD, but it has made me the person who I am today. If I have learned anything about my health journey, it has taught me resiliency, advocacy, bravery, and the ability to be resourceful. My advice to anyone out there: you cannot control the cards that you have been dealt with, it's about how well you use them to live your best life.