

## Surviving Fibroids

About a year ago, running back from the City to Bay fun run, I had to stop due to pain in my left glute and foot. Physios first guessed *plantar fasciitis*, then stress fracture, and then I chose to cease that line of inquiry. I knew intuitively that something was going on further up the line; the site of the pain was not the problem.

I rested by not running. But my daily professional and personal life continued to be chaotic and intense – in retrospect I see I was waging war against myself. I indulged in long work and travel hours, perpetuated heavy financial burdens upon myself and faced ongoing relationship crises.

Little by little I noticed my bladder underperforming; a little urinary incontinence here, clotting in my menstrual blood there and increasingly heavier periods. But I was busy; perhaps I was imagining these symptoms. But irregular and increasingly frequent pain in my pelvic region unceremoniously indicated otherwise.

One morning, I awoke to find my stomach distended; it looked and felt like I'd swallowed a soccer ball. There was finally, undeniably, 'something-wrong!' Three days later an MRI revealed an 11 cm tumour.

Five months ago I was diagnosed with a large fibroid growing on my uterus. Many women are diagnosed with fibroids, and many undergo hysterectomy.

I researched fibroids and discovered many therapies and activities to be of benefit. I began to see an acupuncturist, a psychotherapist, a massage therapist and a naturopath. I found it necessary to modify my diet, beginning by eliminating sugar, dairy, gluten and caffeine – these are foods to which my body showed intolerance. I got honest with myself, reflecting on where I was responsible for my state of health. I identified and began removing stresses in my life. I changed my work habits, reducing and renegotiating my work hours. I peeled back my financial burdens. I began to take quiet daily walks on the beach. I cleaned up my relationships. I prayed and journalled daily. I took the council of trusted friends.

For six weeks I employed Plan A, a purely holistic healing protocol. My fibroid did not respond. My last period spanned 14 days; I felt gutted and defeated. I decided that I needed to launch Plan B.

Plan B involved Dr Vincent Lamaro, recently profiled in *Marie Claire* for his work in the field of gynaecology. I was started on a course of synthetic hormones called *Zoladex*. This radically reduced my oestrogen levels, inducing menopause; the intention being to shrink the size and vascularity of my fibroid.

Feeling better I began to gently increase my levels of exercise. My naturopath advised against it, but I knew for me that I must move to be well. Increasingly I found I was able to run, ride and swim with my clients again. It felt clear and right. The key was listening to and respecting my body, ensuring I managed its requirements for rest.

My journey has required a melding of conventional, holistic and spiritual therapies and activities to cultivate a positive healing outcome and meaningful personal growth.

My fibroid was removed by key-hole surgery. I wanted to maintain my uterus intact and to minimise the impact of any surgery on my working life. My surgery marked a record for my surgeon Dr Vincent Lamaro. Measuring 13 cms, it proved to be the largest fibroid he had removed by laparoscopic surgery.

In the midst of my health challenge, I attended an educational live-in course, 'CHEK Exercise and Lifestyle Coach, Level 2'. This was a pivotal experience that integrated the lessons of my fibroid-journey with my role as coach. I returned genuinely shifted in my understanding of self-nurturing and my ability to prescribe and apply creative healing strategies.

Three days after surgery I was rushed to emergency where I spent two nights. This experience was a tough reminder that I am utterly at the mercy of my body. In the depth of my situation I felt a testing of my faith in the universe and of my willingness to accept life on life's terms. I could fight with anger and resentment, or surrender and open myself to the experience of powerlessness and peace. I chose peace.

Life is frenetic; it's so easy to ignore our own health and wellbeing in the bustle of achieving success and being responsible for others. We are not bottomless pits of energy. If we don't keep depositing into the bank account of our health, one day we'll discover that there's nothing left to spend. I waited too long before responding to the calls of my body. Don't wait until you're account is empty and you have a health crisis on your hands.