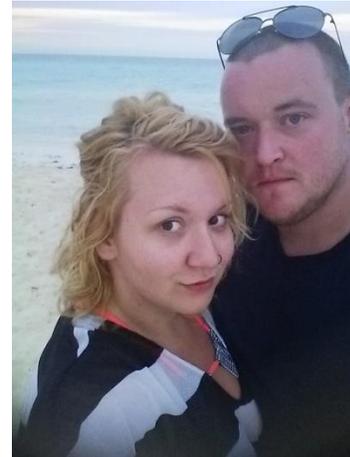


## **“Not All Fat is Created Equal!”**

### Erica Thompson’s Lipedema Story

Erica is a loving wife, mother, daughter, sister and friend. Lipedema affects not only her, but those she loves, which is why she is determined to do something about it for herself, and other women suffering.

At age 8, Erica began a six month course of oral and inhaled steroids in order to increase her lung function. During that time, she gained just over 80 pounds. At 8 years old, gaining 80 pounds is cause for alarm and she was taken to every pediatrician and dietician her Mom and family doctor could think of. After numerous failed diet attempts to remove the excess weight, her family physician decided the best course of action would be to simply try to stall any weight gain that may arise during puberty. Erica became very active in sports, both during and outside of school. Despite this, when puberty began for Erica, she gained weight regardless of eating or exercise habits. Oddly enough, most of this weight gain was in her legs, which her family doctor was thankful for as she remained incredibly healthy for someone with her BMI.



Erica & her husband, Sean



Erica & her girls

Throughout her teen years Erica steadily increased in weight, with little change to her upper body. As she was considered healthy, having no comorbidities of obesity, her physician was not concerned. Despite her overall good health, Erica’s legs became increasingly painful and would fatigue after very little physical activity. Finally, she thought, her weight was beginning to take its toll on her body. In her early twenties, Erica became pregnant with her eldest daughter, Bella. During her pregnancy, Erica lost a total of 68 pounds and gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby. Despite this uncommon weight loss, her legs actually increased in size during the pregnancy. Once she resumed her hormonal birth control, the weight piled back on at a rapid pace. Her physician was perplexed but insisted she must be doing something to sabotage her weight loss.

Fast forward 2 years, Erica and her husband decided it was time for another child. This time around, Erica had a new family physician who was amazed that, despite being pregnant, Erica again lost over 60 pounds during the pregnancy. After this pregnancy, the same cycle of hormonal birth control and weight gain repeated itself. That is when Erica and her physician decided together that something needed to be figured out.

Erica resigned herself to the idea of needing bariatric surgery, and a referral was sent in to her local clinic. While in the waiting process, her doctor took her off of hormonal birth control and Erica was able to lose over 100 pounds on her own through a high protein diet and a regime of weight training.

After losing over 100 pounds and going from a size 24 to a size 12, Erica was disheartened to find that her legs were now far more painful and sensitive to pressure. She was constantly bruised from incidents

she had no recollection of and found herself keeping her legs up more than she was able to run around with her children, it was completely devastating for her. With google searches in hand, she took the information to her bariatric specialty nurse who took one look at her legs and said “Erica, you have lipedema, and I am so sorry.”

Since then, Erica, with her physicians support, has received conservative treatment measures including decongestive wrapping, manual lymphatic drainage massage, and has been fitted for custom compression stockings. None of these treatments have given her relief to the debilitating pain she feels on a daily basis.



Erica – wrapped in conservative treatment

Erica says “It is such a cruel disease, not just physically but psychologically. I am in the “best shape” of my life, but yet what I am capable of doing is even less than it was when I was 100 pounds heavier. My children deserve better, as does my Husband, myself, and all the women who suffer from this disease.”

Erica has met with a couple surgeons who are familiar with lipedema and its surgical removal. However, Alberta Health Care denies any acknowledgement or coverage of any form of treatments for lipedema, either surgical or conservative.

Her struggle is not unique to her, it is all too common not only in Alberta but across Canada. Her determination to help not only herself, but other women and potentially her own daughters, is what led Erica to co-create [www.lipedemaalberta.ca](http://www.lipedemaalberta.ca). As Erica says “Not all fat is created equal, and lipedema is not a fat woman’s disease, it is, however, a disease that makes women fat.”