

“What?! My Fat isn’t supposed to hurt?”

Sandra Hall’s Lipedema Story

Sandra is not your typical woman with obesity, but her story may be more common than you think.

The first diet she remembers being on was around puberty when her physician put her on diet pills and her mom signed her up for Weight Watchers because her legs just kept growing larger. When she didn’t lose any weight, she was accused of stealing food because they felt that she should be losing weight given the diet they had her on. Sandra says, “It was a constant theme, them thinking I was lying about my food intake. This went on with every doctor, nutritionist, and dietician I saw for 40 years until I met Dr. Allison Macqueen who finally believed me. Though I was able to lose weight in my upper body, my legs and arms seemed to only grow bigger and heavier.” The psychological and emotional pressure, fueled by fat bias from peers and the medical community, developed into anxiety, depression, and an eating disorder.

There were physical symptoms as well. Bruises appeared out of nowhere. Her legs were also so heavy they felt like she was “dragging cannonballs” around, and as she progressed, her legs became easily fatigued. They were so sensitive to touch that she would feel a sharp stabbing sensation even when her dog would jump onto her lap. Worse yet, her mobility had started to become impaired so much that she eventually had to utilize walking sticks to aid her. Her doctor was perplexed but chose to refer her to the Calgary Ambulatory Lymphatic clinic and put her on medical leave from her job.

The clinic therapists said she had a combination of lymphedema and lipedema but they could not diagnose her as they were not physicians. Sandra then turned to the internet to seek answers. When she saw pictures of women



Sandra – wrapped in conservative treatment

with Lipedema, she excitedly shouted, “Their legs look like mine!” Then she read about the bruising, extreme fatigue and sensitivity, the pain, the loss of mobility and she finally realized ‘What, My fat isn’t supposed to hurt!’ Determined to receive an official diagnosis, her journey led her to New York and Mount Sinai Hospital where her suspicions were unequivocally confirmed. It was Lipedema.

Sandra was determined not to completely lose her mobility but was unable to find a surgeon in Canada experienced and knowledgeable of lipedema. This led her to travel to Germany where their research and experience with Lipedema surgery are at the forefront of medical expertise.

After her surgeries with Dr. Josef Stutz, she feels she is no longer destined to live her life in a wheelchair. She now has an increase in mobility beyond her expectations and her biggest struggle in regards to lipedema is trying to manage fatigue, a compromised immune system, and the psycho-social disorders often seen with lipedema patients.

Sandra says “It is exhausting having to contend with a fat-biased society and a medical community who have little or no knowledge of lipedema, or the potential struggles and effects it causes both physically and emotionally.”

Her experience in Germany is what inspired Sandra to co-create www.lipedemaalberta.ca to help other women in Alberta and across Canada who may suffer from Lipedema because, in her own words, “Lipedema is not a fat ladies disease, I became obese because my lipedema went undiagnosed for more than 40 years. I need to help others learn about this disease before it progresses to the stage I am at.”



Sandra and her husband Scott



Sandra – post op, holding containers of the diseased fat removed from her legs