

Laina's Story: Epilepsy

It is kind of like an out of body experience. You feel you're not inside of yourself, you feel like you're watching over yourself from above. It's very confusing, emotionally tolling. But then there's also the happy parts. I was pulled closer together with my family.

I've formed really close connections with the nurses, and doctors that have helped me throughout this diagnosis. I feel that it not only has made me a stronger person, but also has made the people around me a lot stronger. My name's Laina Stackwoods and I have epilepsy.

I was 12 years old and I was sitting in the back of a babysitter's car with my younger sister. We were kind of just joking around, laughing, having conversations, and all of a sudden I had this feeling like my head tilted back and I tried to move it back down, but it was stuck.

I was unable to move. So all I could see was what was above me. And all of a sudden I was just blacked out. And when I woke back up, we were pulled over to the side of the road and I was getting carried out to the ambulance.

Well, I was at work, so when she had her very first one, I got a call from the babysitter and she never calls me, so I knew something was up. Laina had a seizure and they had taken her via ambulance to the local hospital. I was hysterical. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what it meant. I got there and she just looked not like her.

She was a... You know, the coloring was off. She was exhausted. And we got home and within 15 minutes, 30 minutes, she had another seizure on the couch. When we got to the ER, she started to have another seizure. So within four hours she had three.

The third one was by far the worst she'd had at that point in time. She stopped breathing. They kicked my husband and I out of the ER room. Our world went black at that point. We didn't know what was gonna happen.

It was frustrating to leave the hospital without a diagnosis, but we celebrated every moment we could 'cause we never knew what was going to happen next. That my brainwaves were looking normal and the seizures, it was an odd experience that possibly isn't gonna happen again. And then two years later, I had another full body seizure, and then that's when I was diagnosed with epilepsy.

We didn't know there were other types of seizures and we thought she had gone like a full year, year and a half without one, and we finally got the diagnosis. What we didn't realize is that she was having some of the smaller ones in between during that year and a half.

So I have three different types. I have obviously those full large body ones. I have one where you don't really even know that I'm having a seizure. I'll be able to have a conversation, but 30 minutes later I won't remember anything.

And then there's ones that kind of look like ticks. I'll make noises with my mouth and then move my fingers. So learning about those different types of seizures was definitely a big step in what's underneath the definition of epilepsy.

As a parent, it is terrifying to watch your child go through this. The first time she had a seizure, and did not know who I was when she woke up was one of the worst moments of my life. It's to have to wait and wonder if she's going to remember. And then when she does, it's exciting and you know it's gonna be okay. But in that moment, it is awful to sit there and watch that happen.

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There's a lot to know. Take the time to learn what your child's triggers are, and know how to handle those situations and be an advocate. Don't be afraid to talk about it. Make sure you have a good support group.

But first and foremost, allow yourself to feel all the feelings. Your mental health is just as important as your child's mental health. They need you and you need them. So you both need to be in a state where you can handle and manage through it.

My friends, as an emotional support system, they are very, very big in making sure people are aware, and don't judge me for what I have. They always make sure that I'm okay, especially if I miss a day of school.

I'll wake up, multiple texts. Are you okay? Talk to me if you need it. It's good to know that I have those good people in my life that are always there to support me no matter what.

It's not an uncommon diagnosis, and it is possible to do amazing things, even though you have it. Continue to advocate for your family, for your child, and for everybody else that's living with this. She has epilepsy, but epilepsy does not have her.