

HEALTH



STAFF PHOTOS: KEITH J. WOODS

Beth Rosenthal (left), founder of It's Just Benign Inc., hugs Lauren Jager Roselle of Point Pleasant, who is a member of the group that supports people living with benign brain tumors and their side effects. Rosenthal and Roselle met earlier this month.

JOY OF LIVING

Brain tumor survivors find support in each other

By **SUSAN BLOOM**
CORRESPONDENT

On an otherwise typical fall day in October 2007, Lauren Jager Roselle's life took a frightening and unexpected turn.

While talking to her friend Robin on the phone, she suddenly experienced a seizure. Hearing the phone drop and Roselle's kids screaming in the background, Robin rushed over to Roselle's home to find her shrieking on the floor.

Later, on the way to the hospital, Roselle suffered a more serious grand mal seizure.

"I don't really recall any of what happened," the 44-year-old Point Pleasant resident said of her "life-altering" events that day.

A doctor later would deliver the news: Her seizures had been caused by a brain tumor in her left temporal lobe. Roselle underwent surgery to remove the tumor and was "euphoric" to hear that it was benign.

"It was such a relief to get that news," she said. "You believe the nightmare is behind you, and that that's it."

But in many ways, it was only the beginning of Roselle's journey. Surgeons were unable to remove all of the star-shaped tumor, requiring Roselle to remain on anti-seizure medication, from which she has experienced allergic reactions and other side effects including depression and fatigue. She still feels soreness on the side of her head where she had surgery and must have an MRI every few months to ensure no tumor regrowth.

"You think about it every day, wondering if it will come back," she said.

Roselle's neuro-oncologist, Dr. Sumul N. Raval, who practices at Garden State Neurology and Neuro-Oncology in West Long Branch and Toms River, and who is the founder and medical director of the David S. Zocchi Brain Tumor Center at Monmouth Medical Center, con-



Rosenthal, Roselle and her 8-year-old daughter, Heather, talk with Roselle's neuro-oncologist, Dr. Sumul N. Raval.

"I was so excited to find the site and connect with so many others dealing with the same situation. It's been so comforting to know I'm not alone."

— Lauren Jager Roselle of Point Pleasant

firmed that Roselle suffered a glioma, a tumor that forms inside the brain matter. They are not hereditary, and their cause remains largely unknown.

"Lauren's tumor could have been there for a long time undiagnosed, ultimately causing a seizure when it got big enough," Raval said. "The determination that the tumor was benign was good prognostically, but she'll still need to monitor it because there's always a chance that it can progress."

Roselle understands the paradox of her condition.

"Everyone says to you, 'Thank god, it was just benign — you're so lucky it wasn't cancer,' and you think you can just move on, but there are often difficult side effects associated with benign brain tumors," she said. "Benign brain tumor survivors like myself get how lucky we are that it's not cancer, but our condition can still be an ordeal."

And, as she soon learned,

there was no formal community of other survivors to fall back on for moral support.

"You just don't hear about benign brain tumor sufferers as much," she said.

Quality of life

Enter Beth Rosenthal, a 37-year-old Edison resident who knew all too well what Roselle was going through. Once an active child who had loved dancing and gymnastics, she was diagnosed with a benign brain tumor at 11 which, after two operations and radiation, set her own life on a difficult new course. She lost all hearing in her left ear as well as some high-frequency sensation in her right ear, has weakness along her left side and difficulty using her left hand, and struggles with balance.

The physical pain from her condition, trigeminal neuralgia, also caused her to "miss out on a lot of life experiences along the way — in school, at work and in

For more information on It's Just Benign and benign brain tumors, or to volunteer, buy a T-shirt or make a tax-deductible donation to support the cause, visit www.itsjustbenign.org or contact Beth Rosenthal at 732-371-5338.

social circles," she said, noting that benign brain tumor sufferers deal with a variety of serious concerns, including chronic seizures, migraines and the threat of malignancy.

"We understand that people with malignant tumors are dealing with life and death, while our community is dealing more with quality of life," she said, "but we still face challenging issues nonetheless."

Finding few other benign brain tumor survivors to communicate with, Rosenthal resorted to creating her own forum, launching an organization called It's Just Benign Inc. and a website in May 2008. An online clearinghouse for information on benign brain tumors as well as a place for survivors to chat and exchange information about their condition, the site has amassed more than 430 members from all over the world.

"It's so exciting to help others connect and to create more awareness of benign brain tumors in the public consciousness," Rosenthal said. "The fact is, if people can't see your disability, they don't understand it. It's Just Benign helps give a name to this condition for the first time."

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PEOPLE'S PHARMACY



By
Joe Graedon &
Teresa Graedon

Milk of magnesia combats acne

Q. I am 38 years old and have never had acne in my entire life. In the past year, however, I have had a severe acne breakout, mainly on my forehead.

I am not too sure about the cause, and I've tried everything under the sun to control it, to no avail. Last week, I came across the strange idea of applying milk of magnesia (MoM) to acne. After just four days of use, my acne clearly is in retreat.

Most of the big ugly pimples are gone from the sides of my forehead. The new ones seem to be getting smaller. I am very impressed with the results from MoM and hope they continue.

A. We first heard about this remedy three years ago when a mother reported success for her son's acne. A letter in the Archives of Dermatology (January 1975) reported that nightly application of MoM reduced acne redness and inflammation.

Q. The past weekend, I had terrible diarrhea. At first I assumed it was a virus, and after three days I started feeling a bit better. But the past two days my stool is almost white, like dried-up dog poop.

I have never seen this before and would like to know what could cause eggshell-colored stool. I recently started a new blood pressure medication that seems to be causing constant gas. The drug is something like hydralazine and HCTZ.

A. Pale poop is a warning signal and should always be brought promptly to a doctor's attention. The normal brown color comes from bile, a secretion from the liver that aids in digestion.

A white or light-colored stool suggests there could be a problem with the liver, pancreas, gallbladder (which stores bile) or bile duct that carries it to the small intestine. Your new blood pressure medicine can cause diarrhea and liver inflammation. Contact your doctor right away.

Q. I'm confused about the connection between diet, statins (Crestor) and blood sugar levels. I've taken Crestor for three years, after several years of trying unsuccessfully to lower my cholesterol levels with a very low-fat diet.

On Crestor, the cholesterol came down quickly, but now I'm getting "prediabetic" readings (around 110) on my fasting blood glucose.

My doctor has suggested I go on a low-carb diet, which is the opposite of what I've been trying to do for so long. Is it really OK to eat meat, cheese and eggs while I'm on Crestor? I don't think I can avoid fat and carbs at the same time.

A. Crestor and Lipitor (and other statins) may raise blood sugar (Journal of the American College of Cardiology, March 23, 2010). A low-carb diet has been shown to improve blood fats as well as blood sugar (Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism, March 2010).

Another reader reported this experience: "Twenty years of a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet did not work. My cholesterol was as high as 330, and my triglycerides were 800.

"When I got fed up and started eating eggs, my cholesterol went down. The body needs cholesterol and will make it if you don't eat it."

Contact the Graedons via their website, www.PeoplesPharmacy.com.

Go high-fiber and reduce risks to heart

USA TODAY

Here's another good reason to eat broccoli, beans, whole-grain bread and other fiber-rich foods.

A high-fiber diet appears to reduce your lifetime risk of cardiovascular disease, especially if you are consuming lots of fiber when you are young and middle-aged, according to research being presented today at an American Heart Association meeting in Atlanta.

Other studies have shown that diets high in fiber (fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans) are associated with a lower risk

of high blood pressure, obesity and elevated cholesterol, which increase the risk of heart attacks. But not much has been known about fiber's role in lifetime risk of cardiovascular disease.

So researchers at Northwestern University in Chicago analyzed dietary-recall data from more than 11,000 people, ages 20 and older, who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. People were divided by age group: young adults, ages 20-39; middle-aged adults, ages 40-59; and older adults, ages 60-79.

The researchers predicted life-

time risk for major cardiovascular events such as heart attack, stroke and death from heart disease using a formula that took into account blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking habits and diabetes. They controlled for factors such as physical activity, education, drinking and total calories.

Only 15 percent of people consumed 25 grams or more of fiber a day, which is the amount recommended by the American Heart Association.

People who are in the top 25 percent in dietary fiber intake — that is, they consume more than 22 grams of dietary fiber a day — are more likely to have a lower

lifetime risk for cardiovascular disease, says lead author Hongyan Ning, a statistical analyst in the department of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "The association also applies to older adults, but it's not as strong."

Endocrinologist Robert Eckel, a spokesman for the American Heart Association and a professor of medicine at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus in Aurora, says the study reinforces the fact that "fiber is important for heart health," which for many people means eating a diet with more complex carbohydrates.