



by Lisa Mildon

My life of denial began when I was nearly nine years old. After a routine checkup, the doctor noticed I had high blood pressure. Pretty unusual for an 8-year-old. After further testing, the doctor discovered I had a non-functioning kidney. It had to come out as it was damaging my remaining kidney. So, at the ripe old age of 9, I had my left kidney removed.

My parents were told that I could live a relatively normal life, but no contact sports. I think their fear of losing me made them shelter me like a glass figurine. Often, I would sneak off outside, climb trees, wrestle with my brother, and other rough and tumble activities. I suppose, even at that age, I was in denial. But heck, at that age, I really didn't know any better.

My indestructible mentality carried through to my college years. I partied several nights a week, not even thinking twice that I could have any condition that would affect my social life, much less health. Thankfully, I outgrew those wild moments mostly and began taking better care of myself, but my diet was in shambles.

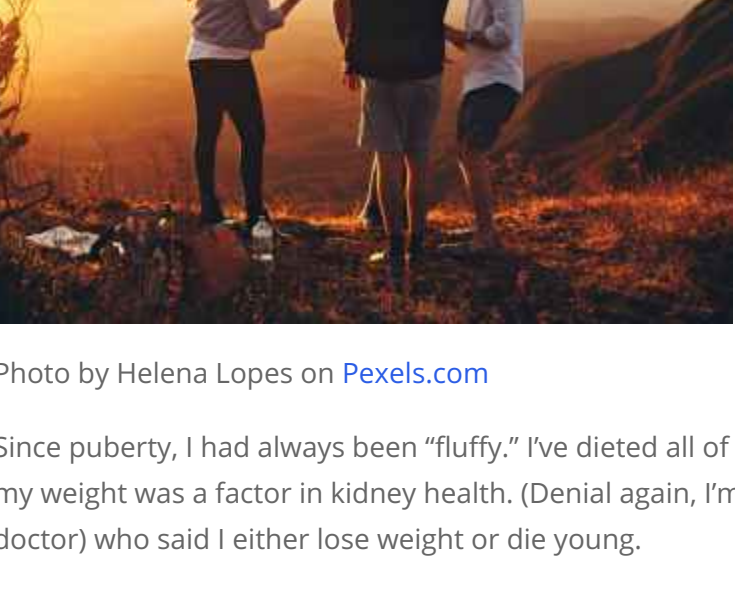


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Since puberty, I had always been "fluffy." I've dieted all of my adult life with varying amounts of success. To my recollection, I never had a doctor tell me that my weight was a factor in kidney health. (Denial again, I'm sure.) That was until in 1999, my regular physician sent me to a nephrologist (kidney disease doctor) who said I either lose weight or die young.

This bit of news scared the living sh\*\* out of me. I did a very drastic thing and had gastric bypass surgery. (Basically, a stomach stapling.) It worked. I lost nearly 100 pounds. The downside, I had so many nutritional issues. I could only eat small amounts. Eating protein was painful to digest. Food that swells, like rice, caused me severe pain. I vomited often. My hair started falling out. I was a wreck... but hey, I was thinner.

Despite my surgeon stating that the procedure he did would "never" stretch out, it did. Those painful moments were actually my stomach stretching. Almost 20 years later, I had gained all but 20 pounds back.

Then I found out I had a gluten allergy. Bingo! I changed my diet, eliminated wheat and gluten products. My weight started dropping again. I had lost over 40 pounds and felt terrific. My numbers on my kidney seemed to stabilize. Yet, according to my doctor, not once did she ever mention kidney disease. Just talked about how efficient it worked and the lack of gout.

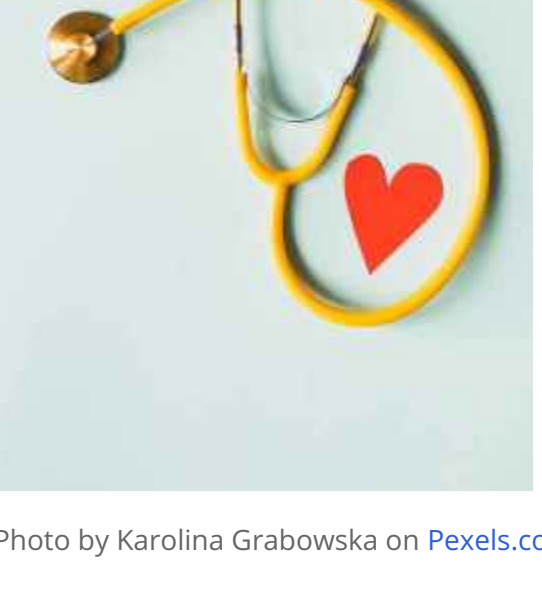


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I wish she had been more upfront with me about my kidney. Perhaps she thought I had already had a talk with a previous doctor. Unfortunately, he failed to tell me anything other than send me to a nephrologist. She had, at one point, asked me if I wanted to go to a nephrologist. As the only one in the area was the same quack who advised me to get stomach surgery, I politely and firmly said no.

Seeing as she was giving me a choice, I thought this was just a suggestion for future care as I aged and unnecessary for my current situation. So, I blindly followed her advice, much to the detriment of my current health situation.

Then, as luck would have it, I moved out of state and changed careers. While all of this may sound exciting (which it has been.), those changes may have aided in my further health decline. I became a freelance editor and writer, so insurance became my responsibility. I couldn't afford that insurance for about a year. Once I got insurance established, the pandemic hit hard.

Trying to play it safe, I waited, thinking that this would be over in a few weeks. Oh, how wrong I was. Out of a considerable dose of precaution, I made an appointment to establish a new physician. My hope was I would find someone who would listen to me and even want my health to improve.

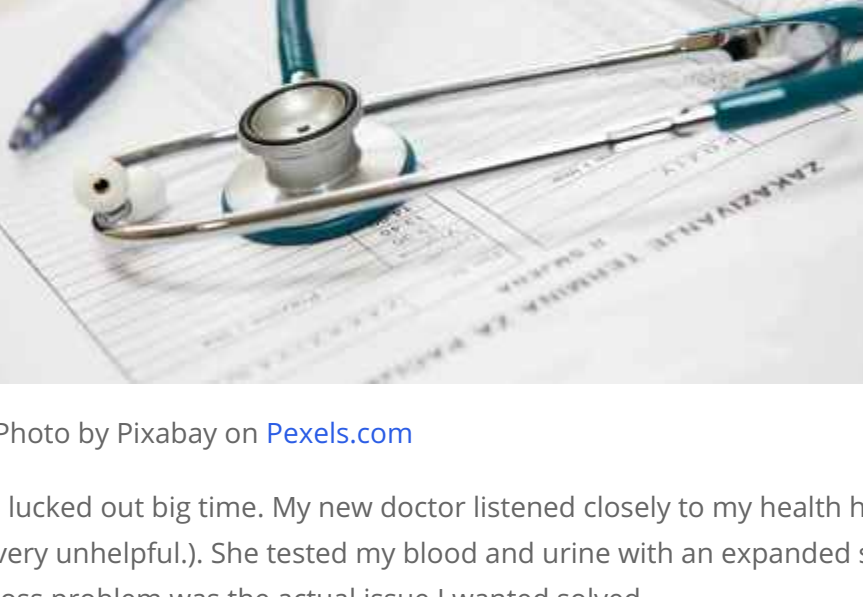


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I lucked out big time. My new doctor listened closely to my health history, asked tons of questions, and even offered to get my old records (My old doctor was very unhelpful.). She tested my blood and urine with an expanded set of tests. I thought, "Hey, I might actually get some help with my weight loss." The weight loss problem was the actual issue I wanted solved.

So, when I received a call to make a nephrologist appointment, it shocked me. Nephrologists are for "those" people who have kidney disease or are in failure, not me. I was in complete denial. I looked at the test results as soon as I hung up the phone. It was pretty grim. It looked like my kidney was on a downward spiral to dialysis.

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"How could it be this bad?" I asked myself. Then thoughts rolled in, images flashed. All those different doctors I had over the years all assumed that someone taught me about kidney care, what things I should eat, what I should avoid, you know, necessary information to extend my life, and the functioning of my remaining kidney.

I realized that even the quack doctor was trying to tell me I had kidney disease. God, it's even hard to type it out, much less say, "I have kidney disease." It scares me to be quite honest. My entire life has been about me having one kidney. Not about my intelligence, not about my sense of humor, just that damned organ in my body.

I had to face the truth. It was time to take action for my health. No more toughing it out with the pain or suffering in silence with an illness. No more sucking it up! It is time I love myself enough to take care of myself.

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I won't lie. Depression had its clutches on me for a week. All I could think about was how I wouldn't live to old age. That I would die and leave my loving husband alone, as he has always feared. It was his determination that shook me back to reality. I could still take action.

With his direct care and research, I began tweaking my diet to be more kidney disease friendly. I trimmed back the amount of meat I ate in a day. I increased the amount of water by twenty ounces. Gone are the "woe is me" thoughts only to be replaced with determination.

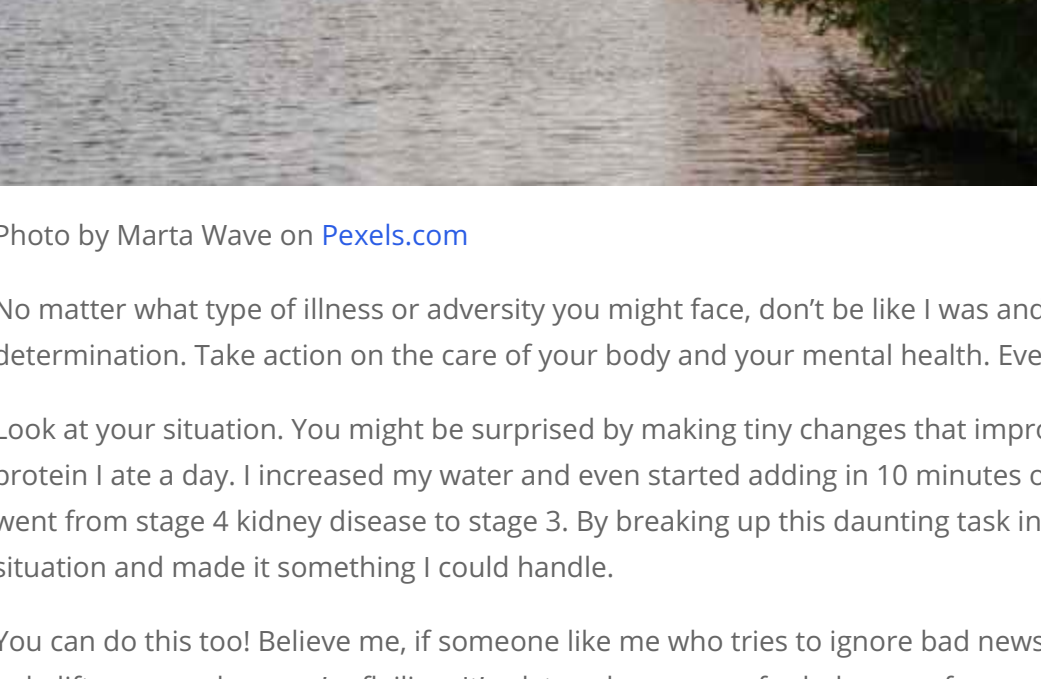


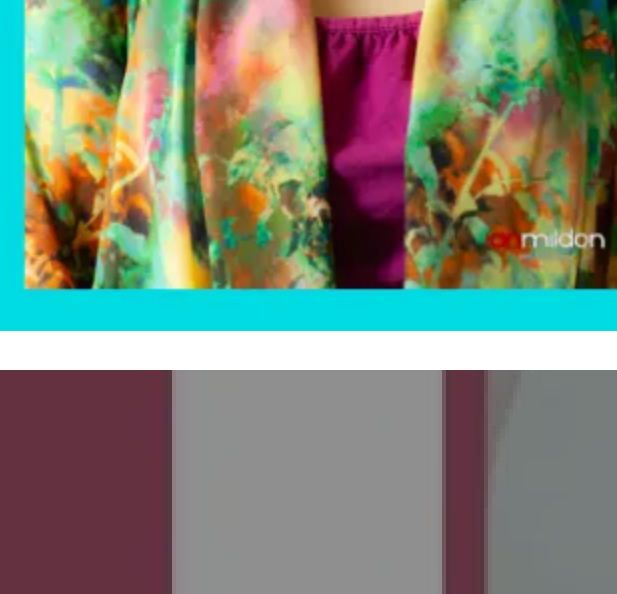
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No matter what type of illness or adversity you might face, don't be like I was and hide from the truth. Dig deep down from within and find that courage and determination. Take action on the care of your body and your mental health. Even from the depths of despair, I chose to live rather than wallow in self-pity.

Look at your situation. You might be surprised by making tiny changes that improvement can be attained. I tweaked my diet by reducing the amount of meat protein I ate a day. I increased my water and even started adding in 10 minutes of cycling on my exercise bike. In two weeks, my kidney numbers improved. I went from stage 4 kidney disease to stage 3. By breaking up this daunting task into small manageable chunks, I took what seemed like an impossible situation and made it something I could handle.

You can do this too! Believe me, if someone like me who tries to ignore bad news can face adversity head on, so can you. Find your tribe of supporters; they'll help lift you up when you're flailing. It's ok to ask someone for help, even for moral support.

I'm looking at my health with open, honest eyes. No more denial or me shirking away from the truth. It's time I stop ignoring the obvious and take charge of my life. Because denial was nearly the death of me.



**Lisa Mildon**  
Contributor  
Lisa Mildon is a professional and coffee-fueled writer and editor for several online publications. Inspired by her step-mom, Lisa discovered natural health as the ripe old age of 15, hungrily absorbing any knowledge about herbs, vitamins, and nutrients, and how to apply it to her own health. When not being the caffeinated wordsmith, she enjoys traveling, hiking, and camping, and various arts & crafts.

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