

## Linsey Painter — Holistic Healthy Alopecia

I'm thirty-five years old and I've had alopecia in its various forms all of my life. Yet these past two years have been the healthiest I've ever experienced with alopecia.

My idea of healthy alopecia has to do with my whole being.

### Healthy on the Outside

When people see me with a scarf on my head—or just my baldhead—most immediately jump to the conclusion that I am sick. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about.

So when I'm doing the Red Arrow walk in Cairns or bike riding with my two boys to school I often get surprised looks.

Exercising can be hot, sweaty business and taking off my cap is the fastest way for me to cool down. I've found that while I'm chugging up the steep path and stairs on the Red Arrow with my cap on people usually ignore me, they're in their own little world of music and breathing, and let's face it, just trying to make it to the top without falling over.

When I take my cap off all of a sudden I see people's heads lift and faces break into a smile. People say, "Hey." And suddenly there is a connection.

It makes me feel good to know that people see me as a healthy individual. I don't have hair and yet I'm obviously not sick either.

### Healthy mind

But being healthy on the outside is only part of it. I have to work really hard on how I think of myself—what is going on inside. I have to work hard at ignoring that critical voice that hammers away at me telling me I don't belong, that I'm not beautiful. I try to block it and overlay it with the truth that I do belong, I am beautiful, I'm healthy and I am loved.

Changing how we think takes a lot of time and effort. For so many years I let those negative statements carve deep pathways in my brain and now I have to try and carve new ones.

Two years ago I decided to get counselling. For me it was helpful to have someone mirror back to me my unhealthy thought patterns and the lies that I allowed to grow so big that I had anxiety. Counselling helped me get the tools I needed to dig out of the stinky thinking that I was in the habit of feeding.



## **Linsey — Not being ashamed has helped me to talk about alopecia with friends and family.**

It's tough having a condition that I can't control—one that makes me stand out. What I can control is how I think about myself. And because I've become healthier on the outside through exercise, that also helps me with my healthy thinking on the inside. Exercise is a great way to reduce anxiety. All that physical activity eats up the adrenaline that pumps through our bodies when we are stressed.

But still I need to go deeper.

### **Healthy Heart**

The most important aspect of my ability to cope with alopecia is my faith. Knowing that I am loved, not because of how I look or what I do but because God is love and sees me as precious—and even honoured—gives me confidence and hope. Everyday I ask for strength, for courage, for boldness—in my interactions with people and even when I look in the mirror.

I've been praying for healing and it's funny cause I have in mind physical healing but slowly over the course of these four years I've been able to accept myself as I am, to love myself and even begin to see the positive aspects of alopecia. I've realised that God's been healing my shame.

It hasn't been easy. I still want hair, I don't think I'll never not want hair but I'm finding contentment as I am and I'm learning how to thrive and I'm not ashamed anymore.

Having a healthy knowledge of who I am has helped me to be healthy in my thinking and in my body.

### **Healthy Awareness**

Not being ashamed has helped me to talk about alopecia with friends and family. It's not being ashamed that has helped me to go out with no covering on my head. It's not being ashamed that has helped me to model for my kids that not having hair is okay.

During Alopecia Awareness Week my kids wanted to share with their classmates the AAAF video, 'Why is my hair falling out?' The teachers were very supportive. After the showing the video I answered questions.

I was so proud of my boys for wanting to share this with their classmates, for not being embarrassed, for wanting to be open.

## **Linsey — Having alopecia is not the end of life, it can be the beginning of a new one.**

I want my boys to have a healthy appreciation about what beauty is, that it's not just about what magazines and movies say we should look like. I want them to know that I don't have to be ashamed because I don't have any hair and they don't have to be ashamed of me.

Healthy alopecia for us as a family means being open and educating friends and family about alopecia. Having people know what is going on with my alopecia has helped me to feel more comfortable around my kids' school, their friends and parents. Interestingly enough people respect me more when I am open about what is going on in my life.

### **Healthy Balance**

We all deal with alopecia in different ways. For me it's important not to go too overboard with thinking that healthy alopecia means I have to be out there with my bald head all smiley and happy twenty-four seven.

It's hard work showing my head to the world and some days I simply don't want to.



Some days I think, "It's none of their business that I'm bald. I just want to be someone in the crowd and not 'that person who looks different'."

Healthy alopecia is about being kind to myself, giving myself the freedom to wear a wig or a hat or a scarf or nothing. And not thinking that I'm not healthy if I feel better when I wear a wig or if I'm not comfortable showing certain people my head—ever.

Before I go out I gauge how I'm feeling that day and who I might see. Some days are bold and brave days, other days are quiet, blend-in days.

Whatever kind of day it is I know I can feel comfortable and not ashamed. I'm not a super fit body-builder, I struggle with my thoughts everyday and I need to ask God for help constantly but I feel like I'm moving in the right direction. I feel blessed to be where I am, in the community that I live in and in my amazing family. Having alopecia is not the end of life, it can be the beginning of a new one.