

I've had RLS for over 20 years but for most of that time, I didn't even realise that my condition had a name. Many nights I'd walk the floor whilst my family slept. I'd wake up tired. I was constantly tired. I would often function in a zombie like fashion. I was irritable and angry all the time. I think it made me a terrible mum. More than once I put my family's life at risk while driving sleep deprived but I just didn't know how badly it was affecting me. I've been sleep deprived for years now and it's taken a toll on my health. I now have a heart condition. RLS has robbed me of so much of my life.

I spoke to a doctor in 2012 about my symptoms and my concerns about being so sleep deprived but she didn't seem to be concerned at all. She told me to take iron tabs and brushed me off. The next doctor I saw was in 2016. By that stage I was so utterly exhausted and just so over what I was going through I was desperate for help. This doctor was more interested. She insisted that I get a sleep study done. It revealed I got no REM sleep. No wonder I never felt refreshed by sleep! I've been on medication for 2 years now that helps control my RLS symptoms. It allows me to get 5-6 hours of sleep a night instead of the usual 3-4 hours so it's better but I'm still chronically sleep deprived.

This is what I would like doctors to understand. Dismissing RLS as just an inconvenient problem that causes uncomfortable feelings in the legs is doing a great disservice to the many people who are genuinely suffering. If a sufferer can't control their RLS symptoms they will be sleep deprived and constant sleep deprivation has serious health implications. But controlling symptoms isn't easy. The medications that are available don't treat the cause. We need more research into the cause of RLS so that there are more appropriate treatments available to us. And we also need doctors to have a better understanding of what RLS is and how it affects people's lives. I hope by sharing my story it helps to raise awareness in the general community as well as the medical community.

*Written by Meryl for RLS Awareness Day 2018*

