

"HOW I FINALLY ...cured my headaches

and recaptured my life"



SUSIE
with
daughters
Natalie, Ella,
and Gray

→ THE PAIN WAS LIKE

a nail piercing my skull—right through my eye socket. I was a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and it was my first migraine. The agony lasted almost two days, radiating through every pore in my body. I threw up and then crawled into bed, pulling the covers over my head to shut out the light while I tried to sleep it off.

Migraine: a constant companion

Through the rest of college, I learned to expect this routine of pain, nausea, light sensitivity, and hours or days in bed about four times a year. An internist prescribed something that gave me a little relief, but I felt so out of it when I took it that it wasn't worth the trade-off.

By my late 20s, I was suffering from migraines two to three times a week. I tried an over-the-counter ibuprofen migraine medication, which helped a little and didn't make me feel strange. As time went by, my life improved in so many ways—I landed my dream job managing stock portfolios at a mutual fund; I married Chris, the best man in the world; and

I had my first daughter, Natalie—but the migraines kept coming.

After my second child, Ella, was born, the headaches started happening more often—up to six times a week. I chalked it up to stress, trying to balance caring for my girls with my career.

Since prescription and OTC drugs weren't really working for me, I tried other treatments: acupuncture, physical therapy, and massage therapy. I also eliminated a few common triggers, such as red wine, chocolate, and cheese, from my diet. Some of these steps seemed to cut the number of migraines, but the relief was only short-term.

So I learned to function in a constant state of pain. I didn't realize the fog I was in and how much the migraines were holding me back. At times, we'd go to the park and Chris would play with the girls while I'd sit it out on a bench. Missing out on precious family time was the worst.

An injection of hope

Finally, I found help at a dinner party, of all places. In 2011, Chris and I invited David H. Song, M.D., and his family over because his daughter Olivia was a school friend

UNFAIR SHARE

27
million

American women get
migraines, while only

9 million
American men do

★
"Finding the causes of my migraines was tough. A neurologist helped me realize how much stress I was holding in my neck."

—SUSIE HULTQUIST

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★ FEEL GOOD

of my daughter Natalie's. I told my story to Dr. Song, the chief of plastic and reconstructive surgery at the University of Chicago Medicine. He asked if I had ever considered Botox. I said, "No way." I didn't know much about Botox—and I was afraid it would make me look different. But after speaking with Dr. Song, I found out it wouldn't drastically affect my appearance and that there were few risks as long as a board-certified doctor was performing the procedure. I also learned that Botox wasn't permanent—it would last only three months. I thought to myself, *I don't have to marry Botox. I can just date it to see if it works.*

Out of the tunnel

Soon after, I went for a consultation with Dr. Song. "You know," he said, "I've got time—I can give you the first set of injections now." I had to get back to work, but when Dr. Song told me it would take just 15 minutes, I decided to go for it then and there.

After the first day without a headache passed, I didn't think much of it. *Must be a fluke*, I thought. But a second day passed, and then a third. I found myself holding my breath, waiting for the

"Poor sleep can be a trigger for me, so I get at least seven hours a night"

pain to set in. I was afraid to tell anyone, because I didn't want to jinx it. I wasn't truly ready to accept success until I woke up one morning and realized it had been several weeks since my last headache. I went from having a migraine six days a week to getting only one to three in the weeks before I was scheduled to get my shots. I see Dr. Song every three months for Botox now. And my face has barely changed—except I have fewer wrinkles!

The world seems sunnier now—I think about my life before and wonder why I settled for living with all that pain. Now I'm so much more energetic. I do yoga and exercise regularly, which I could never do when I had migraines. And I feel happier, too. After I started Botox, I happened to see Dr. Song's wife in the hallway at my kids' school. I ran up to her, threw my arms around her neck, and said, "Your husband saved my life!" I really meant it.

—SUSIE HULTQUIST, AS TOLD TO JANE BIANCHI

What works for YOU

Our readers' migraine tips

"I use relaxation techniques to ease tense muscles."

—Amy Stokes,
Seattle

"The biggest help for me has been the prescription drug Sumavel DosePro."

—DUSTY POSEY,
SAN DIEGO

"I went from a diet of mostly fast food to eating mainly fresh produce, beans, and nuts."

—AMBER BARRY,
ATLANTA



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