



THE LIFE-CHANGING IMPACT OF A LATEX ALLERGY



of night, I had an unexplained event of anaphylaxis. It's hard to explain in three minutes just how much a latex allergy does impact on your life. It changes everything you know in your life dramatically, not only in my life, but in the life of my family and my friends and everything that they do. Everything that you take for granted in life becomes something that you have to think about and process. The spontaneity in life has disappeared a little because everything you need to plan; to go out for dinner; you need to plan to do your groceries.

“Latex is literally everywhere.”

Imagine yourself working in normal night duty, planning the care of your patients, checking on them in bed and chatting with your colleagues in the passage. Then, without warning, you turn red, develop hives and an itchy nose. You feel like you’ve scored a huge hit of hay fever and then you noticed your tongue is swelling. Then, vaguely in the distance, you hear a familiar voice calling: “Melita, Melita, are you ok? Quick, someone call a med!” It is the after-hours coordinator, both your colleague and your friend. You hear the med called over the PA system and the world is spinning a little. You vaguely feel yourself fall to the floor guided by someone’s arm as you hear an escalated call and the code blue alarm sounds.



FACT FILE	
NAME	Melita Taylor
ROLE	Registered Nurse
LOCATION	Australia

Melita Taylor: Hi, I’m Melita Taylor, I am a registered nurse and this is my story.

2 years ago, I was diagnosed with a Type I biphasic latex allergy. Before that, I had been working as a nurse since the year 2009 when I graduated from my dream job. Living with a latex allergy has changed everything about my life, my career, my family and everything they do.

Originally, when I was first working in nursing, I developed a sensitivity to latex. I developed a rash on my hands that became quite itchy and when checking with other staff, they suggested I stopped wearing latex gloves. From that time on, I never wore latex gloves but I did continue to work in a healthcare setting that always used latex gloves around me.

Tell us about your experience with a latex allergy.

Melita Taylor: So, I had a latex sensitivity diagnosed but I continued in my career for over 14 years with no further issues. One day, randomly, in the middle

That was me. Without warning, I was suddenly the patient in intensive care and not the ANUM on night duty. It would be four anaphylactic reactions later and multiple allergy testing before it was decided that I had a latex allergy and not just a sensitivity anymore. I was anaphylactic and I had a biphasic reaction which means I actually go into anaphylaxis twice within four hours despite constant treatment. The implications on an individual's life with a latex allergy are huge. My life, the life of my family and my friends' has changed dramatically. I have had 19 reactions in the last two and a half years. Ten of them were in my work place, seven of them in the community, and two when I was actually in for elective surgery. I now take a medication regime for over 15 medications and it varies every day.

How do you live with a latex allergy?

Melita Taylor: Living with latex allergy has changed the outlook of everything in my life. Having to train my eight-year-old daughter to use an EPI-pen because she is the only other person at home with me, to deal with something I would never have considered as something that had to happen. It is a really difficult task to explain just how much it impacts on her, the things she has to give up, the things she cannot do and the things we cannot do together as a family. Just the simple things like planning to go out and about, you know. To go out on a whim, and say "Yes! We will do that!", is the stuff that we cannot do anymore. We go, "Yes, we'll do that, but let's just make a few phone-calls first, make sure it is safe and then we plan everything." We always have to have a back-up plan, to make sure that if something happens while we are out, I've got somebody who knows where we are and who can pick Maddie up if I have to go to hospital. And the reality is that this happens and it has happened many times.



What is your reason for sharing your story?

Melita Taylor: I guess the reason for sharing my story is to try to make people aware of latex allergies and how quickly they can change. If you do have a rash or develop asthmatic symptoms quite unexpectedly then it is really important that you do get it checked.

I didn't ignore mine, it just went away and I continued to work in a latex environment. I would encourage any hospital who is planning or looking at changing over to seriously consider going completely latex-free, because being a half/half, working with latex and non-latex doesn't work. It doesn't prevent latex allergies; it doesn't protect the staff. Hospitals going to a latex-free environment not only protect their patients and their clients, but it also protects their staff and everybody within the healthcare setting.

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