

### I was an Epileptic patient for last 23 years...



**Yasho Wakankar** I am the happiest person in the world now! Since the last one & half years I haven't had an epileptic attack! This was possible because of the Neuro-surgery I went through in July 2003. I used to have 2 to 10 attacks a month. This surgery was done in Trivandrum, at 'Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences'. Now my family, my friends and I are living a very happy life. The anxiety and suffering is finally over.

**1st July 1980:** I was 7 years old. That day I had my first Epileptic attack. I was unconscious for the whole day, I was suffering from left Temporal Lobe Epilepsy and since that day my attacks started increasing. At first I used to have 2-3 attacks a month, but day by day the attacks increased, and up to last year number of attacks per month settled on 5 to 10. There were so many restrictions on me. Swimming, driving, running was not possible for me. Above all it hampered my quality of life a great deal and every moment was an anxious moment.

Both my parents have very positive thinking nature. They never treated me differently or as a child with some illness. They brought up my sister and me in the same manner, but due to this illness I could not participate in any of the sports and outdoor activities. So my parents encouraged me to cultivate hobbies, which I could do at home. They started me on Indian classical music's class, drawing and many other hobbies. For me, classical music turned out to be my meditation, which is still continuing. At first, drawing was a hobby, but eventually it became my profession. I became Commercial Artist.

My mother, Dr. Anita Awachat, was my mentor from my childhood. She was a perfectionist. She taught me how to take medicines on time, how to keep notes about the attacks etc. Her opinion was, tablets are our friends, we have to accept them happily, and we have to say while taking medicines that I will be all right because of these medicines! She taught me how to accept my illness and how to live positively with epilepsy. Epilepsy is not only a physical disease, it also depends on your mental strength as well. It is said to be a psychosomatic as well. Meditation helped me counter the disease from time to time. When I met Parag, my husband, we started doing Vipassana, a scientific technique of meditation.

My mother was affected by cancer in 1989. But she was not at all nervous or depressed. She was working hard till her last day before she got admitted even if she was a cancer patient. That was when I realized, my disease is nothing compared to Cancer. I was told, Epilepsy is not an emergency disease like cancer, so why should I cry. I just have to accept it.

Parag, my husband also thinks very positively, just as my parents. After our marriage he started to know & learn about epilepsy. He started to read, surf the net on this subject. He used to give information about this subject to me. My attacks were increasing day by day. Then one day my Neurologist, Dr. Pradeep Diwate told us about the possible Epilepsy surgery.

We were in Belgium on account of my husband's job. During that 1 ½ year stay, my attacks became very erratic and finally the most dreaded thing happened. I burnt my hand to third degree. I got an attack while I was cooking. That is when we decided to finally take a chance at Epilepsy surgery. We came to India, took an appointment at Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute. After Video EEG, initial check-ups and diagnosis of one-week stay at Sree Chitra, Dr Radhakrishnan told us that I was a good feasible candidate for surgery. This gave us a ray of hope. It was a very important and critical decision and we had nothing to lose.

I was operated on 2nd July (my surgery was 495th epileptic surgery at Sree Chitra!). Operation lasted for about 8 hours. After a long wait, Doctors told Parag that operation was successful, but the anxiety didn't go right away, because my family and I lived with epilepsy for 23 years. All the doctors and nurses at Sree Chitra are very dedicated, and caring team. After operation I kept myself occupied with origami, and reading to ignore the pain. My recovery was very fast, and I was discharged after 7 days. The first review at Sree Chitra after 3 months showed no signs of epileptic activity in my brain. This was sheer joy to us, this was simply too hard to believe & too good to be true. I am very grateful to the team at Sree Chitra, which includes all Doctors, Nurses and the Staff.

Now I want to share my joy. I always wanted to reach out to people (this I possibly inherited from my parents), and hence decided that whatever the disease & a successful surgery has taught me and the manner in which I seem to have conquered it, should be passed on to as many epileptic patients as possible.

This has given rise to an idea of forming a support group for epileptic patients and their families. I started to meet epileptic patients and their families and many Neurologists in Pune. I told them about my operation and shared the idea of support group with them etc. I learnt about a very active epilepsy support group, "Samman" in Mumbai. I started to attend the support group in Mumbai. When I saw confidence in epileptic patients, I felt very glad! Yet there is a need to bring about more awareness in the society. An epileptic can lead a normal life, live happily while fighting with the disease.

Neurologists in Pune are very co-operative. Some of them have started to send their patients to me to counsel & convince them for the Epilepsy surgery. When people look at me as an example of successful operation, they happily get ready for the operation! My support group is supposedly starting next month. Who so ever is interested, or know any epileptic patient, please do call me on my cell phone: +91 9822008035 or pass on this message to them. I will be more than happy to be of help

**It is just a beginning of new life...**

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