

## **Ana Verónica García Sánchez, 33, Spain**

The starting point of my new life with thyroid dysfunction was a simple delay in my menstrual cycle. Well, let's say three delays of more than 10 days in a row. I went to see my gynaecologist who identified my condition after I told her my symptoms; all of which I thought could be easily attributed to many every day circumstances. Unknown to me they were all due to a little gland I had hardly heard about before: the thyroid. I had some blood tests taken which were sent to an endocrinologist for analysis.

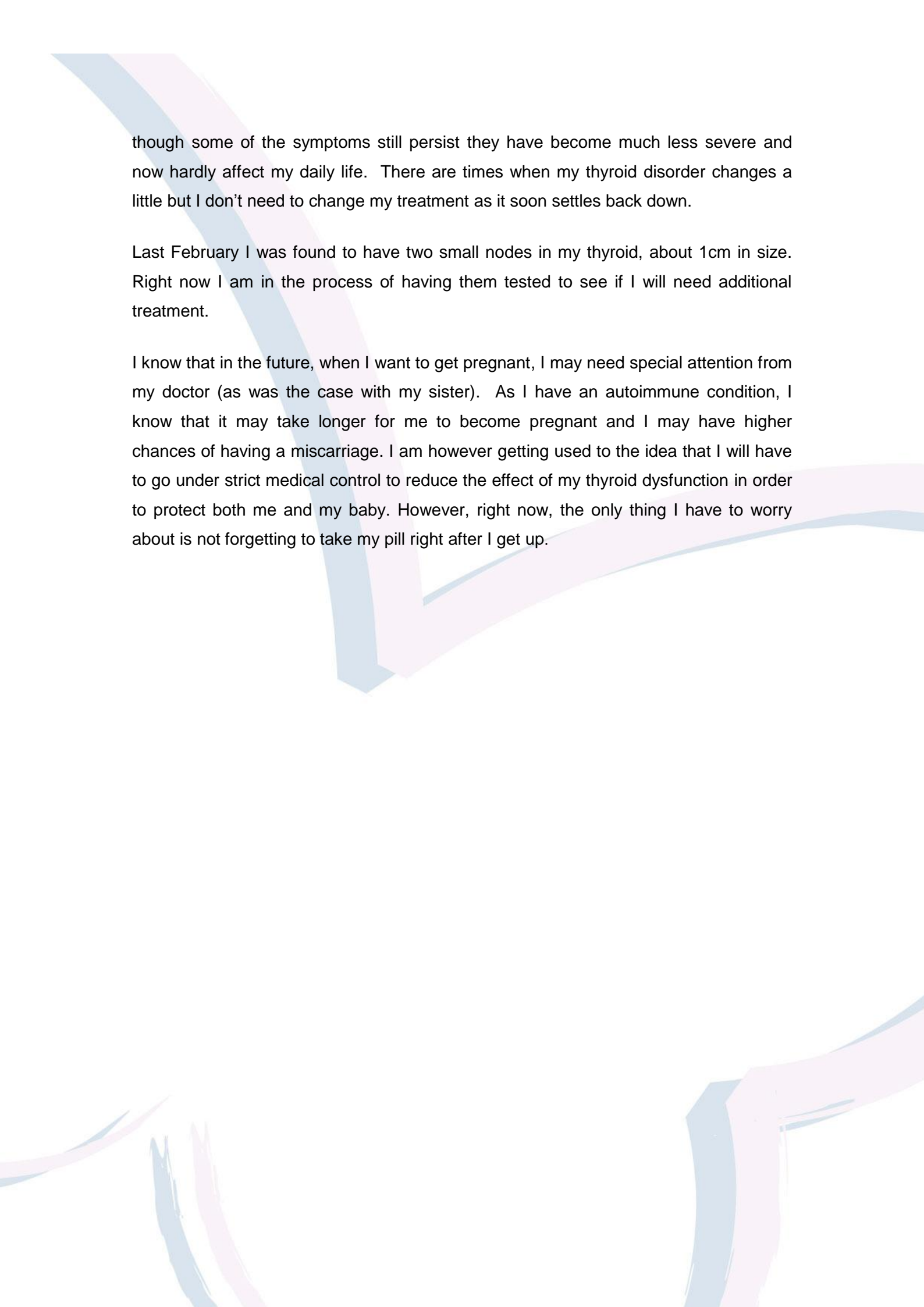
Hypothyroidism (an underactive thyroid) was confirmed after I had some further tests done (which were quick and painless). My doctor gave me a drug called levothyroxine (a synthetic thyroid hormone) to counter the lack of activity in my thyroid gland. I then found out that the thyroid was the controller of the body's metabolic processes.

Suddenly it became clear that hypothyroidism was the cause of all my problems: weariness, weakness, weight increase, feeling cold, menstrual disorders, hair loss and other emotional changes. I had these symptoms until I was treated but I never thought it could be because of a thyroid dysfunction. I had finally seen the light and I did not feel abnormal anymore. I now understand why I gained weight despite keeping to a very strict diet. The constant weariness made me feel like an old lady, I didn't have enough energy to do simple daily tasks. Sometimes I couldn't join activities which people at my own age were doing and I even felt left behind at work. However, I think the symptom I liked least was my uncontrollable emotions.

It took me a while to learn about thyroid dysfunction. In the beginning the only thing I knew about this condition was that hypothyroidism means you can get fat without eating and hyperthyroidism means you lose weight no matter how much you eat.

Since then, I've found out that genetic factors play a large role in this condition. My father, my mother, my dad's mother, my mom's sister and my sister all suffer from some kind of thyroid disorder. We have all learned to cope with our illness and keep finding out more and more about our respective thyroid problems. The genetic link has also been apparent as time has progressed.

With just a little pill (levothyroxine - synthetically produced thyroid hormone) my thyroid condition is now under control. I have regular check ups every six months and even



though some of the symptoms still persist they have become much less severe and now hardly affect my daily life. There are times when my thyroid disorder changes a little but I don't need to change my treatment as it soon settles back down.

Last February I was found to have two small nodes in my thyroid, about 1cm in size. Right now I am in the process of having them tested to see if I will need additional treatment.

I know that in the future, when I want to get pregnant, I may need special attention from my doctor (as was the case with my sister). As I have an autoimmune condition, I know that it may take longer for me to become pregnant and I may have higher chances of having a miscarriage. I am however getting used to the idea that I will have to go under strict medical control to reduce the effect of my thyroid dysfunction in order to protect both me and my baby. However, right now, the only thing I have to worry about is not forgetting to take my pill right after I get up.