



## **LIPEDEMA LADY PATRICIA WASHBURN**

**Transcript of Lipedema Lady Video Episode 21**



## LIPEDEMA LADY

# PATRICIA WASHBURN

### Living with Lipo-Lymphedema

When I was eleven, I went through puberty. I was the first girl in the class to develop, and I developed in a fairly spectacular way. At that time, I also developed what were delightfully known on the playground as "thunder thighs."

I never really did organized sports, but no matter how much I worked, or ate or didn't eat, they were still there, and I was overweight, kind of chose to be. I really didn't feel like my body was worth investing in all through college. After college, I went through a time of significant weight loss. At one point I was down to the smallest I've been as an adult, a size 14, which just tells you I'm built big. I went through various cycles of being more and less overweight, but still always having this heavy hips, butt, legs situation.

For a long time I didn't exercise, well, because it hurt, and because I didn't feel competent at it. There were lots of people around me who were skinnier, stronger, faster, better at this stuff, more coordinated. And it's hard to stay on your own journey and not compare yourself to those people.

I do experience pain, and it's kind of weird because I think I always have. I think I don't know what it's like to not have it.

**It was important to me to try to get the word out about this condition, because my mother went to her grave not knowing that it wasn't her fault she couldn't lose the weight in her legs. And I didn't want anybody else to have to feel that way.**

When I was, I would say thirty-nine or so, I was commuting from Maine to Boston, seventy-five miles each way. And I started noticing that I was in more pain, that I was

experiencing more anxiety, and started actually noticing peri-menopausal symptoms. And from there, that's nine years ago, things have just gotten worse and worse and worse with me physically.

When I was forty, I had a cellulitis infection on my leg, and I walked into a physical therapist's office, and she said, "Oh, you have lipedema," and I hadn't even taken my coat off. So I went home and I looked up lipedema, and damn, if that wasn't what I had. And so I became a blogger on the topic, I became active in the internet support group that was available on the topic.

It was important to me to try to get the word out about this condition, because my mother went to her grave not knowing that it wasn't her fault she couldn't lose the weight in her legs. And I didn't want anybody else to have to feel that way.

Most of the time, if you hear hoof beats and a neigh, you turn around and there's a horse. Occasionally, it's a zebra. Most of the time, when a fat woman walks into your consulting room, she has ordinary obesity, but sometimes, it's lipedema. So it's been important to me to use my skills of writing and media knowledge to try to help people find information about this.

## **Choosing Not to Have Surgery**

I'm usually one of the voices of, "You know, maybe you want to think twice before the liposuction," and there are people who, I totally understand it, really just want to be rid of this. Any surgery, any break in the skin is a potential exacerbation of the lymphedema that I'm already suffering from. So I am not going to consent to any surgery on my body that isn't absolutely necessary for my survival.

I would say nothing that I've done has been particularly brilliantly effective. One of the things that has been most lastingly helpful is water exercise. When I'm in the pool, I feel competent, I feel confident; my body is strong. It can be fast, it can do things that it can't do on land.

“ **This condition is not a death sentence. It’s an inconvenience. I’m alive, I can do lots of really interesting things, I can make a difference in my community, in my family, and to myself.** ”

Right now, for example, I’m using a walker quite a lot of the time to get around. Eventually, that may have to become a wheelchair. At the same time, there are lots of people who have it lots worse, and so part of what I try to do is to make sure that some of my energy goes towards being helpful to people who have it worse than I do.

I have really enjoyed some of the connections I’ve made with smart, interesting people. I’ve really enjoyed being able to connect people with good resources and information to help them deal with this.

This condition is not a death sentence. It’s an inconvenience. I’m alive, I can do lots of really interesting things, I can make a difference in my community, in my family, and to myself.

## About Patricia Washburn

Patricia Washburn is a journalist turned technical writer who in the past blogged about lipedema at <http://biglegwoman.com>. She has Stage 4 lipo-lymphedema and lives with mobility issues, depression, and chronic pain. She is fortunate to have a great job, amazing friends, and access to a pool!

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