

## Living With Epilepsy

Stacey Maola

Stacey Maola is a 38-year-old mother of two. She is married to her high school sweetheart, and works for TD as a personal banking associate. And that's not all. On top of all this, Maola lives with epilepsy.

Her seizures started when she was just a teenager, but at the time she didn't know what they were, especially because they were only lasting 10-20 seconds. "We started calling it 'the feeling,'" said Maola. "I would have them and majority of the time nobody would even realize that I had it."

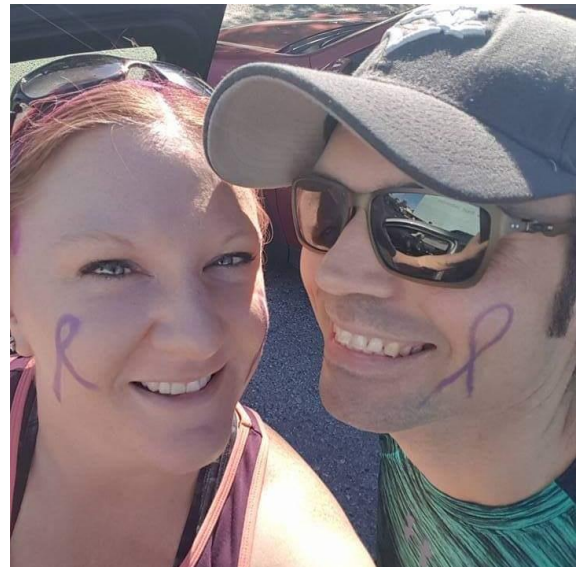
In her mid-twenties, the symptoms became more obvious. Maola experienced lip smacking and slurred speech, but she didn't recognize it was noticeable until a co-worker pointed it out.

The symptoms continued and remained visible until Maola finally went to a doctor. At the age of 27, she was diagnosed with epilepsy. She was then referred to a neurologist and prescribed medication, but it didn't seem to help. "The seizures were still not controlled," she said.

Maola realized the severity of her condition in 2016 when she had a seizure while driving and unknowingly hit a tree. "I thought I was fine until my coworker said I hit a tree and I had no idea. That was my first indication that I was having absence seizures."

Maola's medication changed with this realization, but the seizures continued. Just 10 months later, she found herself in another car accident, this time hitting another vehicle head on. "It was really a terrible experience for all of us, but no one was hurt," Maola said thankfully.

After more unanswered questions and unsuccessful medications, Maola was referred to the Epilepsy Program at University Hospital. That was when Maola's life really changed – she was given the option for surgery. "It kind of threw me for a loop. I was young, and I had small children, but I thought I'd go through the process and at least if I know I am a candidate for the surgery."



Maola was put in the epilepsy unit, and after many tests and procedures she got news that she was a candidate.

“I had the surgery in October and I have been seizure free since,” Maola said proudly.

The road to recovery was not easy. She struggled with her mental health, along with the physical pain of the surgery. But six weeks after the surgery, Maola started to get in touch with nature and herself, and she saw a big improvement.

“I was walking and I was meditating. I had a lot more energy. That was the main change that I have seen, it’s just the energy that I have compared to when I was having the seizures.”

Another huge support that Maola found was with ESWO. The local Educator “has been one of the biggest supports for me. She arranges monthly sessions in Sarnia and I try to attend every one because it’s nice to meet people especially now that I am a success story. I feel like it’s more important for me to share my story with other people that are struggling and let them know that I went from a very bad place to a successful ending,” she said.

“There is hope,” Maola concluded. “If you can try and keep a positive frame of mind and reach out for support if you need it, things can get better.”