

# FOUNDATION'S APPROACH TO TREATING MS ALSO HELPED MY LUPUS

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I was diagnosed with lupus, a disease that causes the body's immune system to attack healthy tissue, at the age of 19. I struggled with regular, life threatening flare-ups, which often left me hospitalised and fighting for my life. When I finally discovered The Gawler Foundation I was overjoyed by the possibility of fighting my disease using simple lifestyle changes.

Lupus was causing my immune system to attack my internal organs, leaving me with kidney problems, severe rashes and sores, inflamed fingers and joints and serious exhaustion and anaemia. As there is no cure for lupus, I was very reliant on prescription drugs to calm the symptoms. But I always knew that my next relapse was just around the corner and I could end up in hospital again, and faced with being told that I may die within weeks. With the diagnosis and the effects of my disease, my whole life was turned upside down. I had to give up my career as a kindergarten teacher, and I've never been able to return to working with children, because of all the risk that even the most common infections present to lupus.

A few of my friends had mentioned The Gawler Foundation to me, as they had battled cancer and managed to fight back using techniques they'd learnt at the Foundation's retreats. After seeing Ian Gawler speak in Sydney, I was amazed when I heard about how he cured his own cancer, and he spoke with such passion and belief. I immediately called the Foundation and asked if the Overcoming Multiple Sclerosis Program would be helpful, as MS shares some similarities with lupus. The therapist advised that the approach advocated for MS was most likely to be of benefit to someone suffering from lupus, so I immediately signed myself up, and hoped the experience would inspire me to fight my disease.

The program blew me away. I was very impressed with the evidenced based approach of Dr Ian Gawler and Professor George Jelinek. They shared their personal experiences and provided us with a lot of scientifically based advice about approaches that had been shown to be most beneficial. They both provided a balanced approach for anyone who also wants to use the more conventional or traditional medication. This is why they call it an 'integrated approach' because it embraces a range of approaches to improving ones health.

Diet was promoted as a huge factor for recovery. I learned how certain foods can be harmful when battling such major diseases, and although it's difficult for anyone to completely change their eating habits, I couldn't ignore the evidence and facts that were presented during the program.

I didn't have to stick to the exact diet that was being advocated for MS sufferers, because lupus is different from multiple sclerosis, but we did discuss the benefits of giving up or at least cutting back on certain foods, like sugar, wheat, red meat, caffeine and alcohol. Even though changing my diet was a challenge, it was one I was wholeheartedly prepared to take on, in order to fight my disease. After all, the disease itself was very challenging, and I was determined to do whatever I could to give myself the best chance of improvement. My determination paid off when my regular check-up revealed my disease had improved, and doctors were happy to see my recovery. So, with the evident improvement in my health, I knew that the hard work in changing my diet, and making healthier choices, was all worth it.

On the residential Overcoming MS program, I spent five days at The Gawler Foundation, in the beautiful setting in the Yarra Valley, where I was provided with delicious and nutritious meals, as well as juices too. The program showed me how easy it is to eat healthy foods, and even though it's more of an effort to stick to it when back at home and making it all myself, it's good to know that it is possible to eat delicious tasting foods, while sticking to a strict diet plan.

I would definitely recommend The Gawler Foundation's retreats to anyone. I have friends who found the Life and Living Program to be a key factor in their recovery of cancer. In my view, even people who aren't seriously ill would benefit from taking time out and visiting such a beautiful place, with its incredible meditation sanctuary. Meditation has played a huge role in my recovery and the Foundation provides the perfect setting for learning how to clear your mind and de-stress. If it wasn't for The Gawler

Foundation I'd still be having major relapses and waiting for drugs to calm my disease. The retreat aided in helping me manage my illness better, and the memories of the experience always inspire me if I'm having a bad day. Now, at the age of 40, I have finally taken control of my life and my disease treatment. I've identified how stress can be damaging for me, and how to meditate and relax to stop stress from making me ill. I'm now well enough to be working for a nursing home and I plan to set up a lupus support group so that I can help others recover from the challenges that I faced.