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Standing

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Step Six: Get comfortable with needles.

When I finally saw a neurologist for the first time, he approved me for the one available treatment option—botulinum toxin, or Botox, injections throughout my face and neck. The first time I received Botox, I got fourteen total injections. The second time I got seventeen at a higher dose. It caused my eyebrows to look somewhat Vulcan but had no effect on my spasms.

I felt like no one was listening to me.

After my first appointment, I had to come back for an MRI. The nurse poked me six times, trying to get my IV, and blew out the vein on one arm. Once I was finally in the machine, I prepared myself for the noise level I had been warned about and focused on staying as still as possible despite my spasms. What I didn't expect was for the machine to sound more like something out of a goofy sci-fi movie than a printer. My laughter ended up being a greater hurdle for staying still than my spasms.

**Step Seven: Don't let disillusionment become discouragement.**

When I saw an ENT for my throat spasms, she stuck a camera down my nose, declared that I had vocal cord dysfunction, and referred me to a voice therapist. I told her that I had looked into vocal cord dysfunction, and I was sure that it wasn't what I had. Nevertheless, she said I would have to attend at least a few therapy sessions before she would consider treatment with Botox.

Six months later, I nearly broke down during my last voice therapy appointment. We had seen no improvement. As it turns out, you can't do breathing exercises when your throat is closed. Meanwhile, some of my symptoms relaxed for a while, others worsened, and I was now in chronic pain. I felt like no one was listening to me. When I finally saw the ENT again, she once again stuck a camera down my nose and told me I had vocal cord dysfunction. Still, she conceded that we could try Botox injections into my vocal cords. She told me, as I already knew from my extensive research months prior, that the outlook for injections here wasn't nearly as positive as in other muscles and negative side effects were much more likely. The only other potential options if Botox failed were experimental deep brain stimulation or a full laryngectomy and tracheostomy. I left her office on the brink of tears, feeling like I was fighting a very expensive losing battle.

Step Eight: Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

At this point, it had been nearly a year since the major episode that had sent me down this spiraling path of appointments. I now knew that what I had been calling a "tic attack" was really a "dystonic storm," but I was seemingly no closer to

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