

From age 11 to my mid-twenties my face and parts of my body were covered in painful cystic acne, makeup would not conceal. Thick dark hair grew in everyplace that a man may have, including to my extreme embarrassment, on my breasts and face. Shaving my face in the mornings was something I hid from everyone, though teasing happened from visible stubble and razor burn. Hormones caused weight gain and fluid retention around my torso, leaving my legs stick skinny. The beauty of other girls brought feelings of sadness, anger, and jealousy. Diets, extreme workouts, running half marathons, frilly dresses, and makeup would not achieve even the foundation of what I considered feminine beauty. A doctor tried to reduce symptoms with medications. Not knowing the origin was NCCAH, they said I was just extra hairy and should try harder to lose weight. My heart crushed and my mind was certain that no man would ever fall in love with me. Family and friends convinced me to not give up on myself.

Confidence grew with each step I took to control my body. Healthy eating and exercise helped ease some of the symptoms. The breakthrough occurred while researching online and beginning to determine that there may be an underlying hormonal issue. Fear prevented going into the doctor's empty handed so I ordered a hormone test kit online. After receiving results, the clues were leading to NCCAH. Bringing the test printout to a doctor lead to a consult with an endocrinologist. The diagnosis of NCCAH brought an overwhelming sense of relief and validation that the weight, acne, hair, and symptoms were not just unlucky coincidences. Treatment began with three different medications. Since then a spreadsheet tracks the results of blood hormone tests every 6 months, changes in medication strength.

Progress is seen in numbers on paper, not only a shrinking waistline and clearing skin. Laser hair removal treatment in conjunction with those medications resulting in soft, beautiful skin was well worth the cost. At age 28, confident enough in myself; I began to go out on a few dates. Meeting up for a cup of coffee lead to my first love, first boyfriend, fiancé and future husband Jeffrey. Of all the dreams to come true and answered prayers, he is the best! Life is better than I could have imagined. Everyone with CAH should wake up feeling beautiful and powerful like this.

Take control of your body, or help your children with CAH take control of theirs.

There is hope.

THIS IS CAH

Rachel C. Willenbring

THIS IS CAH...

