



WOMEN WHO INSPIRE US

# Sofia Vergara beats thyroid cancer

The star of *Tyler Perry's Meet The Browns* talks about conquering a disease that often strikes women.

BY JENNIFER GRAHAM KIZER

When Spanish-language TV star Sofia Vergara was diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2000, she didn't want to go public. Coping with surgery, treatment, and follow-up appointments was hard enough. But today, as her Hollywood career blossoms with roles on ABC's *Dirty Sexy Money* and the new movie *Tyler Perry's Meet The Browns*, opening this month, the 35-year-old single mom wants people to know that cancer can be conquered. *Health* recently caught up with Vergara while she was waiting to board a plane to Los Angeles.

**Health:** You kept your illness a secret at first. Why?

**Sofia Vergara:** I didn't want publicity because of that. Having cancer is not fun. You don't want to deal with anything else while you're going through it.

**How did you learn you had cancer?**

Because I have a family history of type 1 diabetes—my five siblings have it—I know what it's like to have injections every day and to have craziness happen to your body. So I took my

son to an endocrinologist to be checked out early. While we were there, the doctor wanted to check me, too, and he found a lump in my neck.

**What was your reaction?**

I felt no symptoms, so I was skeptical about having my thyroid gland removed. Plus, the surgery is dangerous. If the doctor makes a mistake, you can lose your speech, or the mobility in your face. But I did it.

**And now you have to take thyroid hormone forever?**

Yes, I take a Synthroid pill every morning. It controls your body's metabolism and gives you the levels that you need. An unregulated thyroid can lead to problems with your weight, hair loss, and other things, so they give me a blood test every three months to see where my level is. Actually, I feel very lucky. In a lot of women, the cancer isn't found until around menopause—and by then it's too late.

**What about chemo or radiation?**

A little cancer remained after surgery, so I had iodine radiation. It's not that bad. But you can't see anybody for a few days. You're radioactive.

**Where was your son during all this?**

I was living in Miami, and my mom and some of my siblings were there, too. They took care of my son, who was about 10 at the time. I tried to explain to him what was happening, so he was aware.

**What was the recovery like?**

Your neck is so sensitive. You can't make any strong movements, so for two months I couldn't drive. Your life stops for a while. I had a scar, but plenty of things can be done with scars these days. They've used lasers and cortisone injections. It's not as noticeable as it was.

**Have you changed your lifestyle due to your cancer?**

For a while, I got really crazy about what I was eating. But then you realize you can't live like that. You go to restaurants, and you have to eat something. You have to live your life. And no one really knows exactly how people get cancer.

**How did cancer change you?**

When you go through something like this, it's hard, but you learn a lot from it. Your priorities change. You don't sweat the small stuff. And it had a good ending.

**You've tried to help families touched by cancer in your native country of Colombia. How?**

Through the charity I sponsor, we're building a cancer center in my hometown of Barranquilla. I visited the cancer ward of a hospital in Colombia, and parents were just sitting on the floor while their kids were being treated. When you're a mother and your kid is sick, you feel it yourself. I want to set up a comfortable place for parents. ●

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