

Diagnosed With Thyroid Cancer, New Mom Counted the Days Until She Could Have Another Child

Radioactive iodine treatment for thyroid cancer required her to wean her baby and to stay in isolation for 10 days.

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In August 2022, Courtney Storti celebrated her son's first birthday. She and her husband threw Aaron a party with a camping theme. They made pizzas and cut into a campfire cake.

A week later, Storti went radioactive.

Storti was 30 and nursing Aaron when she developed postpartum thyroiditis, an inflammation of the thyroid gland that can cause abnormal thyroid function and enlargement of the thyroid gland after delivery. The thyroid gland grows by 30% during pregnancy, so it's not uncommon for women to present with a thyroid nodule during pregnancy. Postpartum thyroiditis occurs in up to 10% of pregnancies.

Storti's primary care physician ordered a neck ultrasound, which revealed a small thyroid nodule and abnormal-looking lymph node that turned out to be stage 1 [thyroid cancer](#). The disease is twice as common in women as in men. Warning signs can include neck enlargement or a feeling of pressure in the neck.

Storti's diagnosis led to a referral to Fred Hutch Cancer Center, where David Byrd, MD, removed Storti's thyroid gland and affected lymph nodes on her left side.

Shortly afterward, she saw endocrinologist [Mara Roth, MD](#).

"Typically with her stage of cancer, we'd recommend radioactive iodine, but we can't treat patients while they are nursing," Roth said.

Treating lactating women with [radioactive iodine](#) while they're still producing milk increases their risk of developing breast cancer because radiation accumulates in the mammary glands and breast tissue.

"We're very careful to get radioactive treatment where we want it and not in other tissues where it

shouldn't be present," Roth said.

A month after surgery, Storti began weaning Aaron, who was eight months old.

"It definitely was an emotional process, having to stop when I wasn't ready to stop," she said. "It was really hard to not be able to be the new mom I wanted to be. I remember sitting in Dr. Roth's office crying and her team being so supportive of me."

After the iodine treatment, Storti had to stay in isolation for 10 days. She bunked up with her in-laws, where she binge-watched shows as her mother-in-law brought her food. She couldn't see Aaron the entire time because he was so young and susceptible to the effects of radiation, so Storti's husband, Andrew, arranged video chats.

"As a new dad, it was terrifying for him as well, but he remained so strong for me and our family," Storti said.

A picture wall of healthy babies

With treatment complete, a scan and bloodwork showed that Storti had responded well. Subsequent scans and blood tests have not revealed any signs of recurrence.

After the radioactive treatment, Storti was told not to get pregnant for a year. After exactly a year had passed, Storti came to see Roth.

"Because the peak age for diagnosis is during the reproductive years, from 25 to 55, we are used to negotiating treatment around pregnancy and someone's fertility goals," Roth said. "Her main question was, 'When can I have another baby?'"

Roth gave Storti the green light. By November 2023, Storti learned she was pregnant.

"I had a lot of fears — about the cancer coming back, how cancer could impact a future child, the outcomes of pregnancies after a diagnosis, how cancer affects fertility — and all my questions were answered," she said. "Dr. Roth said she wished she had a picture wall of all the healthy babies that had been born after treatment. She really put my mind at ease."

Her daughter, Olivia, was born in July 2024.

Since Storti no longer has a thyroid gland, she has to take a daily thyroid hormone replacement pill and get regular labs to measure her thyroid levels, along with scheduling thyroid ultrasounds every six months. Aside from that, Storti is focusing on being a new mom again.

"While some people might say thyroid cancer is a good cancer to get, it's still very difficult," she said. "Dr. Roth advised me to just live my life, enjoy each day and try not to think about it. Two years out, I have a big scar that's starting to heal, and I am on my way."

In a full-circle moment in September, Storti brought baby Olivia along to her recent check-up,

nursing her daughter while Roth performed Storti's exam.

"It was such a sweet experience," Storti said. "Dr. Roth was cooing at her, and when the nurses came in, Olivia was wide awake looking at everyone. It's a very redemptive experience this second time postpartum."

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