

What started as a fantastic job in June 2008 has now ended in a disease with an enormous impact on my life.

In June 2008 I had my first flight as a stewardess. What a fantastic job! I loved to take care of people, chat and make it a pleasant flight. To then arrive at a destination on the other side of the world and make fantastic trips; from lunches at the Niagara falls, shopping in America and safari in Africa. A real dream job.

But complaints started within 3 years; dizziness, headache, a worse memory, often nauseous and vomiting and tired. The complaints became increasingly worse and accumulated. The headaches became terrible; I even got morphine twice during a flight because I couldn't handle the pain anymore and screamed in the plane. I couldn't do several things at the same time anymore. For example, I let go of a full tea jug because someone asked me something and my focus was no longer on holding the jug. The dizziness was so intense that after I got up too quickly, I was still dizzy for hours. My memory got really bad; I could try to grab socks 10 times and then I forgot what I was going to do while I walked up the stairs. I could often not find the right words anymore. My concentration became worse and worse. My hands and feet were tingling, and later my hands and eyes also started to tremble and after that, my whole body. My vision became worse; my vision was blurred, I had tunnel vision and could not judge distances properly. My hands and feet and legs sometimes fell out. My hands cramped and I made uncontrollable movements, first with my hands, later also my whole body and my head. After clearing the dishwasher, I had pain in my arms and hands. I was so tired that I made long nights of 12-14 hours, and then still had to sleep for 3 hours in the afternoon, because otherwise my symptoms worsened.

I already lived as healthy as possible: I did not drink alcohol and did not smoke, worked out a lot and ate healthy, so that couldn't be the cause. Of course I went looking for help with an internist, neurologist and the tropics department. Meanwhile, I had also ended up at a company doctor, but he couldn't do anything for me. He had no idea what to do with me and my symptoms. I then started doing replacement work "on the ground", while I was awaiting all the results of the tests and tried to recover. But nothing came out of those tests; I was diagnosed to be healthy.

Eventually, I ended up with Dr. Mulder, a doctor who is investing his time in researching aerotoxic syndrome. For the first time I had the feeling that someone understood what was going on with me. He could even, before I told my whole story, give a situation sketch of how my course of disease must have gone. Via him, my blood was sent abroad for various examinations. It took a very long time for the results of the examinations to come back. However, I really wanted to go back flying, after 10 months of replacement work. Call it the denial phase, but I secretly hoped it would be something else. If I were to fly and if it were the aerotoxic syndrome, then I would find out quickly enough. So I, perhaps against better judgment, started working as a stewardess again.

In June 2013 I made my last flight as a stewardess, and after that flight I reported sick. My health complaints were, now I was frequently flying, even worse and the existing complaints all increased again. I kept postponing on reporting my sickness, but in retrospect it was no longer responsible to let me work. When I got the results of the blood tests I really couldn't ignore it any longer, the results were clear; my DNA analysis showed that I am the worst type of detoxifier and an auto-antibody study showed that I suffered chronic nerve damage. When I had to visit the company doctor I was trembling so terribly after just an hour of driving that he could not conclude anything different than that I was not capable of working. In the end, I did not do any replacement work for the first 5 months after my illness.

My company doctor told me that at KLM Health Services there is a company doctor who is the contact person for the Aerotoxic Syndrome. She eventually referred me to neurologist Hageman. Hageman concluded on the basis of my research and story that it should in all probability be Aerotoxic Syndrome. This report was not taken seriously; I asked for a response for months, but I was ignored. Meanwhile, I got a different company doctor assigned to me who took my complaints more serious. He indicated that there is more staff around with similar complaints, and therefore there probably had to be "something". However, he never wanted to use the term Aerotoxic Syndrome or confirm such a thing, but said that there must be "something".

We are now over 5 years after my last flight and the impact of the damage sustained remains enormous. My memory and concentration are still very bad and when I have to concentrate for more than an hour on, for example, writing this story, my vision becomes cloudy and I do not get my eyes focused anymore, sometimes I also suffer from tunnel vision. My hands are always trembling slightly, and when I'm tired or after exercise the tremors are severe. I always have a lot of pain in my arms and legs, a kind of cramp or muscle pain. I often have terrible headaches. And maybe the worst thing of all; I am always tired! The past years I have been sleeping every afternoon in order to be able to function at all in the evening. When I don't get enough sleep, my headaches and pain in my arms and legs increase and I start trembling more intensely. And when I'm tired, I just feel more and more miserable.

In November 2017 investigative television program Zembla released two episodes about Aerotoxic Syndrome: "Poison in the cockpit: The silence contract" and "Poison in the cockpit: The interests". Zembla already had two episodes about this in 2010 and in 2013. For the first episode I told my story alongside the story of pilot Felderhof. In the second episode it is shown which interests play a role. It is incredible to see how the interests are more important than people. As if a human life does not matter.

Currently I don't have a job and take care of our 2 children; a son of 2.5 years and a daughter of 1 year. I do need support, because caring for children and housekeeping on my own is simply not possible. The children go twice a week to a daycare or to my or my partner's parents. My friend is at home 3 days a week, and we have help in the household. Recently our son does not need his afternoon nap anymore so I miss out on my afternoon sleep on the days that I am alone. I immediately start feeling worse on those days. I have a lot of pain again and I notice that I no longer understand simple things. In the past two

months we have brought the children an extra day to the daycare and my parents come over more frequent to take care of the children, just so that I can sleep. This is my life now. I really would not know how I could ever work in a normal job without getting even worse. I would like to earn my own money, but I am simply not capable of it. This is starting to become a mental problem for me; the fact that I now have no income and am completely dependent financially on my partner.

The UWV (Employee Insurance Agency) have found me completely fit for work. Even as a cabin attendant! Therefore I do not receive disability benefits. Also because I have not met certain rules because of my resignation, I have never received unemployment benefits. As if the damage to my health isn't already so frustrating this injustice is added on top of all that.

When I did replacement work, I did that for three seven-hour days and I did not have any children when I started. In January 2016 our son was born and at the time of my last replacement work period he was 3-5 months. After getting home after that 7 hours of work I collapsed completely and was vast asleep for three hours. Also, the next day I needed to recover (luckily babies sleep very much and I could still sleep a lot when our son was born). Then the next day I had to work again, while I felt worse than the first working day. I then again completely collapsed afterwards and again try to recover a day and then go for the last working day of the week. That was very hard for me, gradually I felt more and more tired and miserable during the week. Then I had to rest during the weekend as much as possible just to be able to work on Monday again.

It is no life to have when everything revolves around work and not be able to do anything else because it costs too much energy. Social activities also cost me a lot of energy. At a given moment they are almost out of the question. When I'm tired and irritable, it is also difficult to stay in a good mood. All together it takes a lot of energy, so the pain increases again and I suffer from increased symptoms for days. When I exceed my limit, it may be that I need 1.5 week to recover. And of course, this does not mean without complaints. I mean; "Just" tired, slightly trembling hands, a little pain in arms and legs, light headaches, trouble with memory and concentration and vision problems. Those are the good days. I have to continuously make choices about what I can or can't do; everything in my life feels like a constant cost-benefit analysis.