

Purveyor of Healthy Snacks Donates to Otolaryngology Research

While on a ski trip in Colorado in January of 2014, Jason Cohen experienced a fall that cracked his helmet but left him outwardly unharmed. Due to the force of the fall, he went to get an MRI, but the imaging showed no obvious signs of damage. Little did he know, he had suffered a head injury that would lead him on a frustrating journey searching for a diagnosis. A journey that would ultimately inspire him to make a generous, \$250,000 donation to the University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine's Department of Otolaryngology and the physician, Michael Hoffer, M.D., who gave him the answers he so badly needed.



Jason Cohen with his wife and daughters.

“If through support, Dr. Hoffer can train more doctors and get more resources, then he can expand his methods of care, which will give more people the treatment that they need,” said Cohen, who is the co-founder and co-CEO of Halen Brands, which specializes in investing in and creating better-for-you brands. Cohen has been an investor and founder in iconic brands such as Sensible Portions Veggie Straws, Skinny Pop Popcorn and From The Ground Up Snacks.

For Cohen, his search for treatment began a few months after his fall when he began to experience unexplained symptoms.

“I started to have concentration issues,” Cohen said. “I was getting irritable and during a speaking engagement the chatter from the audience caused me to have some type of attack where

I had a hard time remembering my speech. It was hard keeping myself balanced between the lights, and the noise. I couldn't keep it all together, and most of 2014 and 2015 was a blur as I look back."

He went to multiple doctors and heard various explanations for his symptoms – stress, burnout, midlife crisis, even though he was happy in his personal and business life at that time – and he was given medications to reduce stress. However, the medication caused worsening symptoms of vertigo and constant tinnitus. Worse, he recalls feeling frustrated because even though he appeared physically fine, he knew something was wrong internally.

Searching for Compassion

"I wished I had lost a limb at that time, because all I was looking for was compassion," Cohen said. "When it's an internal issue, people don't understand it. They kept saying 'you're successful and look great what do you have to complain about.'"

Eventually, Cohen was introduced to Dr. Hoffer, a professor of otolaryngology and neurological surgery at the Miller School, who diagnosed him with post-concussion syndrome.

"It was the first time that someone treated me with compassion, ordered the right tests and was able to diagnose me with post-concussion syndrome," Cohen said. "This was the first time that I saw light at the end of the tunnel.

Under Dr. Hoffer's care, Jason was taken off medications and received therapies, including injections in both ears, and his brain began to heal.

Dr. Hoffer says, “Mr. Cohen’s philanthropy will go a long way to finding new therapies for people with inner ear disorders, like tinnitus. We are very appreciative of his support.”

A Road Map to Healing

Cohen appreciates Dr. Hoffer’s compassion and dedication throughout his treatment, and “after a year and a half, I was 99 percent better,” he said. “He gave my family and me a strong road map and was accessible with every milestone during my healing process.”

Cohen hopes that others benefit from gift he and his wife established through the development of life-changing therapies.

“Jason Cohen’s experience with tinnitus is emblematic of the need for more effective treatments of the long-term effects of head trauma,” said Fred F. Telischi, M.D., James R. Chandler Chair in Otolaryngology. “The Cohen family’s generous endowment to further tinnitus research at The Department of Otolaryngology Ear Institute will support ongoing and new clinical-translational studies into managing and, eventually, curing this serious and, in some cases, disabling condition.”

The gift is part of the University of Miami’s recently launched Ever Brighter: The Campaign for Our Next Century. The most ambitious in the university’s history, the campaign has already reached \$1.6 billion toward a goal of \$2.5 billion.

For more information on the Jason and Jamie Cohen Tinnitus Research Endowed Fund, [click here](#).

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