

Laura Bonnell at the podium speaking about living with CF



Chronically Ill in a War Zone

An Israeli mother of three shares how she's coping with cystic fibrosis amid the war.

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Life was hard enough for Nirit Maizels, 43, of Ramat Hasharon outside of Tel Aviv before the rockets started flying. The wife and mother of three children, a 14-year-old daughter and two boys, ages 11 and 7, lives with cystic fibrosis (CF). The genetic disorder causes chronic and fatal lung infections and *affects the body's cells, tissues and glands* that make mucus and sweat. There is currently no cure for CF, but treatment can ease symptoms, reduce complications and

improve quality of life.

"I am very worried about my medication. The supply chains are damaged. It's just a very chaotic situation," Maizels says. "Even to take care of myself these days, I have to say I haven't been eating. It's hard to do everything you need to do — keep your children calm and safe — to just try to live a normal life and not to deteriorate my health."

Maizels, a granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, joined journalist Laura Bonnell via

Zoom for a recent recording of her "Living with Cystic Fibrosis" podcast to talk about life with CF amid the war. Bonnell, who is Jewish, has two daughters Molly, 28, and Emily, 26, living with CF. She founded The Bonnell Foundation to advocate, raise awareness and provide emotional and financial support to CF families, which includes financial assistance, education scholarships and lung transplant grants.

"It's horrific to be targeted simply because you're Jewish;

but on top of that, you have a chronic illness and need to continue treatments," Bonnell says. "I just cannot believe how much this mother has to deal with. As Americans, we have no idea about the stress of war on yourself and on families."

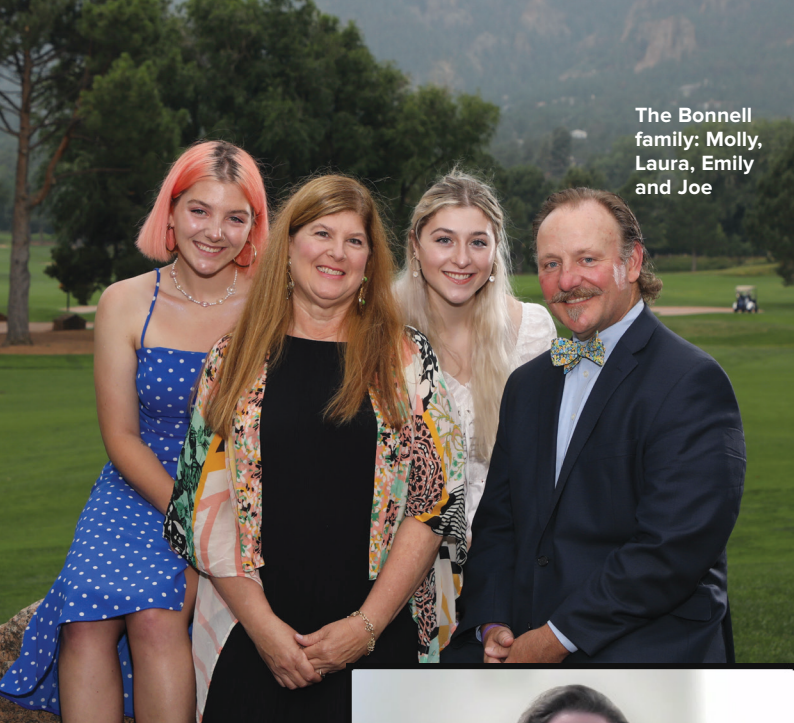
Maizels was first diagnosed with CF when she was just 3 months old. She says about 650 Israelis like her are currently living with cystic fibrosis. Before the war, a physiotherapist would come to her house and provide regular treatments to help ease her breathing. That therapy stopped suddenly Oct. 7 after Hamas militants staged a murderous terror attack, killing and injuring thousands of innocent civilians and taking hundreds of hostages, many of whom have been killed or are still being held in Gaza.

"I think that every single innocent person's life lost is horrible," she says. "I think that people need to understand that Hamas is not the Palestinians. That's not the same. Hamas is terrorists. What they're doing to the Palestinians is horrible."

SUPPORT FOR CF PATIENTS

The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation of Israel is doing what it can to help CF patients during this uncertain time. Founded in 1967, the organization works to increase awareness, diagnose babies as early as possible, improve genetic screening, and assist families with medications, daily treatments and more.

Maizels says due to air quality and safety concerns, she and others are not able to take walks, get exercise and do other things essential for fighting the disease. Inflatable vests can provide what's known as high-frequency chest wall oscillation, a type of therapy to loosen mucus in the chest, but Maizels says the vests are not available in Israel. As



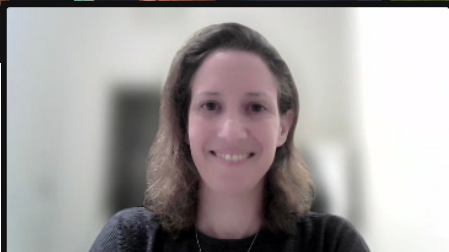
The Bonnell family: Molly, Laura, Emily and Joe

RIGHT: Laura Bonnell, bottom, and Nirit Maizels in Israel, above, talk via Zoom.

a volunteer with CF Israel, she's been helping to make phone calls to find out who needs help and how they can assist.

"So many people are asking for treadmills from their CF organization and for portable nebulizers like inhalator machines," she explains. "I personally even tried to help one of the families that lived in the South — they evacuated from their house; they needed alternative housing. We have families that don't have computers to communicate with doctors online, some of them don't even have smartphones."

Beyond the physical challenges, the mental and emotional toll of the war is profound. Maizels and her family are living in what they call "survivor mode." They barely watch TV; they don't open mail or videos sent to them online, and they're afraid to even take a simple trip to the grocery store. Maizels says she often cries at night when her kids go to sleep due to the



daily stress and anxiety. Still, her story is one of hope and strength. She draws parallels between the resilience needed to live with a chronic illness and what it takes to endure times of conflict.

"I believe that Israel is strong. And I know that people here are very willing to help each other. Everybody's doing their best and we're united against this terrorism," she says. "I see the resilience of Israel a little bit like living with cystic fibrosis. I think some might say it makes us weak, but I think it makes us stronger." 🎧

To donate to the CF community in Israel, visit [jgive.com/new/en/cad/charity-organizations/2463](https://www.jgive.com/new/en/cad/charity-organizations/2463) or to support The Bonnell Foundation, visit thebonnellfoundation.org.