

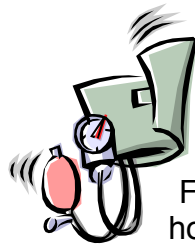
## From NZAN Newsletter No 16, July02

### Jill's Story: Addison's disease

In 1995 when I was 49, my life was ticking along nicely. My job in local government was exciting and demanding, my husband and I had a very busy social life, our two daughters were almost grown up, and on most Saturday mornings I managed to play golf.

Many months and several GP visits later, I knew that my life wasn't ticking along as well as I thought. I was losing weight, had a craving for salty foods, tired very easily, my skin was too tanned for the short time I'd spent in the sun, I frequently had cramp, continually felt breathless and couldn't shake off a persistent cold. When I commented to my doctor about how awful I felt, his response was that I wasn't getting any younger!

At this point, I found another GP who health than my age and over the next number of tests to try and identify conclusions were reached, so in chest physician at the local public which highlighted what was wrong. However, when my blood pressure showed a marked difference between standing up and lying down, the specialist wondered whether I had Addison's disease.



was more interested in my few weeks she conducted a the problem. Still no February 1996 off I went to a hospital for more tests, none of

February 1996 off I went to a hospital for more tests, none of which highlighted what was wrong. However, when my blood pressure showed a marked difference between standing up and lying down, the specialist wondered whether I had Addison's disease.

What on earth was Addison's disease? The only literature we found in the public library said the disease was fatal which wasn't at all reassuring. The next morning I blacked out in the shower so I was admitted to hospital the next day for a series of blood tests over the next 24 hours, by which time it was conclusively proven that I was an Addisonian. I was put on a daily dose of 25mg of hydrocortisone (15mg early morning, 5mg at noon at 5mg at 4pm) and 0.1mg fludrocortisone. I felt better immediately.

Two years later with the consent of my GP and endocrinologist, I cut out the 4pm dose of hydrocortisone as I was having trouble sleeping and felt I would be better off with just 20mg hydrocortisone. I am still on this dose (fludrocortisone intake is unchanged), but my GP also prescribed sleeping tablets (3.5mg per night) which have been of tremendous help. I wear a MedicAlert bracelet, always carry a supply of hydrocortisone and fludrocortisone tablets in my handbag and have an emergency information card in my wallet.

One of the most worrying aspects of Addison's disease for me (and for many others too, when reading their histories) was the increase in weight. I am 5'1" tall, and went from just over 8 stone to almost 10 stone and my GP suggested I



refrain from buying any clothes for the next couple of years! It took more than three years and a lot of hard work to get back to my pre-Addison's weight.

On a brighter note, since my diagnosis in 1996, my life has changed dramatically. Two years ago, Rodger (my husband) was offered a two-year contract in the UK in the Derbyshire village of Buxton (population 22,000) working for a privately owned company that manufactures thermostats. This was too good an opportunity to turn down so within a month of Rodger accepting the position, we were ready to go.

I retired from my job, we found tenants for our house in the country, and off we went with our three suitcases to a new challenge across the other side of the world. We arrived in December 2000 and spent our first year in a two-bedroomed apartment a block away from the shopping centre. Despite the conditions over the first few months (It was dark at 4pm and freezing cold with plenty of snow) we settled down into our new lives in England.

I became a member of one of the two golf clubs in Buxton, joined an informal walking group and gradually became accustomed to a whole new lifestyle after almost 40 years in the workforce. However, I did obtain temp office work in the Buxton Police Station for four months last year. This was a fascinating place to work with each employee being subject to Home Office clearance for possible counter terrorist activities. In January this year we moved again, this time into a two-bedroomed bungalow a little further from the shops, but in a much quieter part of town.

The National Health System in Britain is very 'interesting'. I was originally paying £24 for two months' supply of medications, though the doctor's appointment was free. After eight months of this, the pharmacy suggested I prepay for my medications that would save me around £17 with each two-monthly prescription. It took me another four months to discover that people with Addison's disease were entitled to FREE medication. It wasn't something that my GP told me about – in fact it was a distant relative of Rodger's here in England who suggested I make enquiries.

I also see an endocrinologist at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield twice a year for a check-up. On my visit to him in March we discussed the potential benefits of DHEA. As DHEA hasn't yet been approved by the British authorities, he was unable to prescribe it, but suggested I try obtaining it through a health food shop. However, the health food shop didn't have approval to sell the product either, so through a contact in the USA I obtained three months' supply. I started taking a 25mg capsule daily in early April and I do feel better (Rodger caught me whistling recently!).

I also sleep more soundly than before, though I still take the 3.5mg Zopiclone sleeping tablet. Possible DHEA side effects of acne, increased facial hair and

tender breasts have not occurred so far. Two days after starting on DHEA, my GP put me on HRT, so some of my new sense of well-being could be attributed to this. One major benefit of HRT treatment is that my 'heat waves' have finally ended after enduring them for seven years.

We return to New Zealand just before Christmas 2002, which means we have a few frantic weeks of hectic activity before our younger daughter's wedding in February.

Six years after being diagnosed with Addison's disease, I have well and truly come to terms with my health. I have the occasional 'duvet day', but with golf three days a week plus walking and shopping, thankfully there's not much time left to feel sorry for myself.