

## From NZAN Newsletter No 10 July 00

### Lois's story:

Lois wrote us two case histories. The first disappeared into cyberspace when she forgot to press 'save'! With the doggedness that many of us recognize, she went through the exercise again for us, next morning:

I was finally diagnosed with Addison's in 1980, at the age of 40, after eight months of to-ing and fro-ing to various specialists.

I was told I was anorexic, I was in need of tranquilizers because I was turning 40 - endless excuses for a problem they could not solve. By this time I had lost about 10 kilos, as I was not eating properly. I just could not force food down, and I guess was becoming anaemic due to this. When I started vomiting in the morning my husband decided enough was enough, and we went to see a Dr Tambyah at Mt. Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore.

At this stage I was barely able to walk six or seven metres without having to sit down and rest. Dr Tambyah looked at me, looked at my notes and said: "I think I know what's wrong with you". I was admitted to the hospital, a 24 hour urine sample was taken, and next day he came and told me I had Addison's.

I was started on Cortisone Acetate and Florinef immediately, and within a day began to feel so much better. I was given a CT scan to see if there was any calcification of the adrenal glands, but nothing showed up so they said the glands had atrophied. I am at present taking hydrocortisone 10 mg BD and Florinef 0.1mg 1 tablet in the morning and 1/2 tablet in the evening.

I take my afternoon dose of hydrocortisone later than advised, and it does not present a problem for me with regard to sleeping. I find if I schedule it earlier in the afternoon, I am inclined to forget it sometimes, so it's easier to leave the pills on the table and take them with my evening meal.

I am also taking Renitec 7.5 mg daily for mildly elevated BP. My mother used to say she had high blood pressure, but having lived here in Malaysia for 38 years I was not really much aware of what she was taking. As I am an only child, I do not even have much of a family history to go by.

Basically my medication dose has changed little over the last 20 years. I am 5ft 3in in height and weigh 55 kilos so although I am LARGE in this country when it comes to buying clothes, I am rather small by New Zealand standards. I have no other health problems and rarely get sick with coughs or colds. I have had bronchitis twice in the last 4 years but have never had the flu as such.

All in all, I lead a life free of any major health disorders. In fact it was not until I began reading the Addison's Newsletters that I realised how fortunate I have been with my health. I was diagnosed in my forties, so it has not really affected my life very much from the health aspect. It has, though, affected my choices in life regarding travel.

My husband and I usually travel to a different holiday destination every year, and certain countries have gone onto the back burner. I went to Egypt 8 years ago, and my suitcase was filled with bottled water, which I used for drinking and cleaning my teeth. I had no problem there although I was also VERY aware of what I ate - no salads or raw fruit that I could not peel.

I had also taken water sterilizing tablets, and one day we saw these *magnificent* strawberries. I decided to buy them and we went back to the hotel, put water and tablets into the ice bucket, and then put the strawberries into that mixture. I don't think it did much for the taste, but you do get to the stage where you just long for something uncooked. Addison's has not affected my choices in my sporting life. I play golf here, but do start early in the morning, and I also go for morning walks when I am not golfing. With air conditioned cars, houses and shopping malls life is fine. Of course I don't go out in the heat of the day unless I have to. I do feel the heat sometimes when I am golfing, but put this down to age as much as to Addison's.

Sometimes only a little knowledge is a good thing. I never realised the problems other people have until I started reading the Newsletters. On the whole, I sail through life unaffected by my medical problem. I have never had an Addison's crisis, and my husband and friends who are all aware of my problem would hopefully get me to a hospital if I collapsed in front of them for any reason.

Having lived with the disease uneventfully for 20 years maybe I should give them all an update about what to do in an emergency - one does get a bit blase about these things! There is a Medic Alert Society here in Malaysia and I do wear an emblem but have *serious* doubts that anyone would know what the bracelet even represents. It's not something that I have ever seen advertised here. I carry a card outlining my problem in my wallet and have extra supplies of my pills in my car, my husband's car, my golf bag and my handbag. I have on occasion had to use these when I rushed out and forgot to take my medication.

As far as stress management goes - nothing. I am a fairly placid person, and sail uneventfully through my life, so that has never been an issue. I don't set myself impossible goals, and if I don't feel like doing something, I don't. I can honestly say that in my case I doubt that having Addison's has interfered with my life in any way that relates to the quality of life.

I am from Christchurch originally and met my husband, who is Chinese from Malaysia, when he was studying at University in New Zealand. Our three

children went to New Zealand for secondary schooling and University, and are presently residing there. My mother is still in Christchurch, and at 92 is in residential care. I was sent to Prof Espiner at Christchurch Hospital by the doctor in Singapore, and have continued to see him once a year for the last 20 years. I guess I could find an Endocrinologist here, should I wish, as medical facilities have improved enormously since I was diagnosed, but I continue to go to New Zealand as I know him, and he knows my history.

I am basically a housewife here, as it is difficult for non-Malaysians to work, although I did some nursing when I first came here in 1962. I do some social work with handicapped ladies and enjoy that.

*Travel tips for Addisonians in Asia:*

I think anyone contemplating a holiday in Asian countries should "go for it". When one is on holiday the aim is to fit in as much as possible, and this can entail racing around like a mad thing in the tropical heat. I would advise travellers to allow an extra day or two if they are contemplating a busy tropical holiday.

When I travel overseas I always carry my medication with me in my carry on luggage and also have some spare in my husband's case, in case we should happen to lose mine. I also carry on the plane Solu-Cortef, in case of a real emergency, but have never had to use this. I feel have covered all bases as far as I can in this area.

Bottled water is available everywhere these days. Make sure you buy a medical insurance. Watch what you eat regarding raw foods and things like ice in drinks and ice cream from wayside stalls [both a big NO NO]. I travel with hand wipes so that I can clean my hands and sometimes utensils before eating. I also take a packet of straws with me, but usually drink tea and coffee in restaurants. Maybe living here in Asia for so long I have built up a bit of immunity to these "bugs", but I can honestly say that in all my years of traveling, I have not fallen ill.

I do find from my own experience and that of friends and also from articles in the British papers, that more people are falling ill *after* flights. This is due in part to Non Smoking flights. Because they do not have to clean the air so much, the airlines change the air in the plane less frequently. It costs money to bring in freezing cold air and heat it up so they recycle it more often than they used to. I read an article in a London paper that *one sneeze* can be transmitted 20 rows ahead. The article said tongue in cheek that maybe we should all wear masks on board, I can't see that happening no matter how good the idea is. Certain things are beyond our control, so we can only do so much and leave the rest to fate!

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