

# A shock but no s

The diagnosis came as a shock but no surprise. For the last few years beforehand I'd been feeling pretty crap and putting it down to other things. Mainly hereditary factors and the beginning of menopause (I'm 52 now and was diagnosed at 49 with hep C).

My mother previously had a hypothyroid condition, so it wasn't that fanciful to think that was why I had one too. I'd always carried a bit of weight around my tummy, so likewise it was easy to explain away borderline insulin resistance and tell myself that once I started feeling better I'd start to exercise more and lose the weight.

Any time I ever had a blood test, the AST and ALT levels would be elevated but I always assumed that this was a consequence of having had hepatitis B in the 70s (a few lost years filled with continual attempts at self-obliteration) and never investigated it further. I'd had some big issues to deal with – my Mum's death and my husband's massive heart attack from which he fully recovered, thanks to whatever it is we worship – so it was only normal to be exhausted after dealing with that stuff, surely.

Does all this sound like a familiar pattern? I tried to ignore the occasional itchy skin and stopped noticing my yellow eyes. I'd been doing yoga for several years and had noticed that over a few months my muscle tone decreased, which was odd. I put this down to the start of menopause. I had a bunch of tests to find out what was wrong with me, but eventually a clued-up GP had me tested for hep C, and there was the explanation of all these symptoms. Crystal clear.

The pity party for one lasted a few months, and then I started doing some research online. I found out a few things. Firstly, that there is an awful lot of information on the internet but how difficult it is to know what is reliable? Secondly, my symptoms were very mild compared to quite a lot of people. For example I had no scarring or cirrhosis on my liver. I was fully functional – married with two kids, held down a full time professional job. From then on my focus was learning how to minimise any liver damage and live as healthily as I possibly could. I've never been a big drinker so that was easy. I had

been drug-free for years so this was not an issue either. I started taking a liver herbal supplement, vitamin C and other anti-oxidants as well as other medication for my thyroid. I tried and tried to keep my weight down with varying levels of success, which means without success.

The AST and ALT levels kept creeping up despite all of this. I had a feeling that if I could take time out and rest more then maybe they'd stabilise and maybe even go down, but with a full time job and a family, how can you manage that? I kept telling myself just a few years and the kids will be out of school and I won't have to do so much.

I like to be up-front with people, and I don't like hiding my condition, but I really don't want to be a victim of ignorance and prejudice, so I only disclose when I think it's appropriate.

Sometimes you just get lucky. A chance conversation with a yoga buddy led me to the acupuncture trial being run at the University of Technology, Sydney. The trial involved 24 acupuncture treatments and the measuring of ALT and viral load levels. My viral load level has dropped from 2,880,000 IU/mL to 1,860,000, and my ALT level gone from 126 to around 70! I definitely have heaps more energy and my mind feels much sharper. I feel like I am getting 'me' back. And yes, I will be continuing with the acupuncture treatment

Before going on the trial, I wouldn't have even thought of going to the gym, but thanks to another chance conversation this is exactly what I have done. I have fallen into a weekly routine of three 30-minute sessions of hard cardio training, three yoga sessions (more if I can manage it), a one-hour run and a weights training session. I've had varying medical advice on this and have decided that the best gauge is how I'm feeling (plus monitoring my LFTs), and this training makes me feel great.

I'm now at the lower end of the normal weight range for my height and insulin resistance is no longer an issue. Neither is muscle tone. I guess I'll never know if the thyroid problem is due to hereditary factors or hep C, but it really doesn't matter.

# surprise

I live close to the beach, and it has always been an important part of my life. A couple of months ago I joined the surf bronze training squad at my local beach and completed the training around a month ago, which is a great thing for any 52 year old, let alone someone who has hep C. I now do voluntary surf lifesaving patrols and am looking forward to getting trained as an inflatable rescue boat crew member.

The acupuncture trial and the fitness work I've been doing have contributed hugely to my journey back to health, but I must say that what has kept me going has been my yoga practice. Although there is no evidence of this, I am convinced that without the yoga I wouldn't have been able to deal with the disease - mentally, physically or spiritually. The more yoga I do,

the more I find that the asana and pranayama 'arms' of yoga give you energy in a way that no other systems can. Yoga has been an absolute cornerstone and foundation of my life and I feel blessed to have stumbled upon it.

People say you make your own luck, but I feel extremely blessed and lucky for the coincidences that have enabled me to turn my health around.

Yes, that evil virus is still playing Pac-Man all through my body, but now my immune system is much better able to cope with it. My quality of life is so much improved and I feel like I am living my life the way I want to. I'd still like to be able to get more sleep - maybe when the kids leave school!

**Jan, NSW**

