

PMR story

In April 2018 I suddenly started having pains in my shoulder – first one and then both. I am normally very active – do a lot of gardening, don't drive so walk a lot. I assumed I had been doing too much heavy lifting and sprained my shoulders so went to have physiotherapy which seemed to make things worse.

Then walking became painful and tiring and I felt I was going rapidly downhill – but put it down to my age (80). The last straw was realising my arms and legs were too weak for me to get out of the bath!

Eventually went to see a doctor, and after a few weeks and 2 blood tests was told that it was likely to be polymyalgia (something I had in fact heard of from a friend who suffered from this, so I was not entirely surprised.) I was given a short course of prednisolone 15 mg to see what reaction this had - a miraculous improvement, and I felt fit and more full of energy than ever, which showed the diagnosis was correct.

So I was put on the standard decreasing regime of prednisolone, plus the usual extras for side-effects. It is still early days and I realise there may be ups and downs and the need to adjust the dosage when necessary.

I was on the lookout for side-effects: one thing was an increase in the frequency of occasional severe night-time leg cramps that I had already suffered from for some years, but now I drink a glass of tonic water every evening which seems to help.

The most alarming new thing though was attacks of severe pains in the back, chest, throat which felt like what I would expect from a heart attack. I had never had this before and wondered if it was due to the medication. The first time this happened it did wear off but I went to the doctor the next day for a check up and he sent me to Ninewells where I had a complete heart check. This showed my heart was fine, but the doctor there thought the problem could have been heartburn caused by a hiatus hernia (which I knew I had, but hadn't made the connection) The reason I mention this is that after having had 3 more similar attacks I went to the doctor again and he gave me a fuller explanation: he said that it's caused by acid reflux via the hiatus

hernia, setting the oesophagus into spasm, the likely cause being the steroids. He changed my gastro-resistant medication for a different one, and also gave me some helpful advice from his own experience as he suffers from the same problem with hiatus hernia. (I was lucky to see this doctor, as at our surgery one seldom sees the same doctor twice!). He suggested smaller meals with snacks in between, to avoid attacks, and a hot-water bottle to ease the pain in future attacks. I have been fine since the new pills and following his advice.

One other point I would make is about physiotherapy. A lot of folk in my position would do the same – assume it was a sprained muscle and embark on an expensive course of treatment which is no help at all – but shouldn't a good Physio have been trained to enquire closely about all the symptoms and recognise the possibility of PMR in an elderly woman client? In retrospect I felt I was taken advantage of.

S.M. Dundee. September 2018