



Getting Back in the Game

This past November some terrifying things started to happen to me. My usual active, healthy, 72-year-old self, had to suddenly wear a patch over one eye to prevent double vision, use a walker and a neck brace for weak muscles and wear a bike helmet in case I fell. I couldn't hang-up my bathrobe on a hook or sign my name. I had difficulty chewing and had to wear a bib as water or milk spewed from my mouth because my lip muscles were limp. A fall outdoors sent me by ambulance to the hospital. Following a two-week period of many blood tests, a head MRI, a CT scan, a Chest x-ray and a nerve test, I was diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis (MG).

I come from a small town and was very impressed by the quick diagnosis (a Neurologist is required) and the turnaround of the symptoms. Mestinon, the drug of choice for MG, allowed me to regain, almost overnight, 80% of my muscle strength; it corrected my double vision and eating problems.

The next level of treatment for me has been IVIG. IVIG is a concentration of a human antibodies pooled from thousands of blood donors. Following five consecutive days of IVIG infusions, where approximately 70% of patients see an improvement within the first ten days, I got most of my muscle strength back after the second day of treatment. As they say, the proof is in the pudding: I was able to carry two 18 liters of water in from the car and lifted one onto the water cooler. Quite the change from the fall I took prior to diagnosis when trying to lift a liter of milk from the fridge.

I learned from a presentation by a Dr. Nicolle, a neurologist who specializes in MG, that IVIG infusions are like having an army of good antibodies working for you. I don't know how they know this, but how they work is threefold: 1) They swarm the bad antibodies and dilute them; 2) They suppress the production of the bad antibodies and 3) They bind to the bad antibodies and take them out of action.

Hope these good antibodies continue to conquer my Myasthenia Gravis. If they continue to work for four weeks or more, I likely will need to get a couple of infusions a month for life... These treatments sure beat the alternatives!

I am doing some exercises because of the difficulty I am still experiencing with walking. Recently, I walked with ease, albeit with walking poles, on the track for 1 km and cycled 20 minutes on the recumbent bike. I completed one minute of plank exercise whereas a few weeks ago I could only do 15 seconds. While it likely will be awhile before I start sprinting, I have noticed my stamina is improving. My GP and Neurologist say I should be back playing pickleball by summer. This low impact sport is my goal: **to get back in the game** as seen in the photo. My expectations for 'a new normal' is to be the 'same old, same old' but perhaps at a slower pace.

For information on pickleball visit www.midlandareapickleballclub.ca

Garry Morehouse

Disclaimer: The above story is based on my personal experience and is not to be taken as approved by the medical profession. Also, it is noted that MG is often called the "snowflake disease" because it differs so much from person to person. The degree of muscle weakness and the muscles that are affected vary greatly from patient to patient and from time to time.