

The New Rules of Aging Well - A Life Health Episode

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Like so many who read this, I joined our faith a long time ago...in the 70's when I was in my 20's. Now it's the 20's and I'm in my 70's. My journey took me fundraising for several years, then on to being matched, Blessed and on to a mission. Along the way, Linda and I raised 4 children. Now they are all married and have children of their own. With 9 grandkids I'm in grandpa heaven, and I want to continue to enjoy this as long as I possibly can.

Why am I writing this? Because when I look around at folks our age, it's not always a pretty sight. I see the results of people who've ignored their own health and ignored the warning signs. "Hey, it's just part of aging."

As Frank Lipman writes in "The New Rules of Aging Well":

"It's about being vital and happy and continuing to be able to do the things you love for decades to come."

A synopsis of my own journey: in 2018, pretty much out of the blue, I experienced an 'episode' that lasted maybe a few minutes. Later the same day I felt it come back again. It was a feeling of uncontrollable mind drift - like falling down a mental rabbit hole. I felt extremely emotional and somewhat anxious. I had to stop whatever I was doing, doubled over with fatigue.

But I blew it off.

Then maybe 3 months later, one day, same 'episode' occurred. Then a couple months later, same thing happened. Only THEN did I feel concerned that something 'chronic?' was happening.

They continued. I would have 2 or 3 of these episodes during the day I experienced them and then nothing for maybe a month. But I could tell by my journal entries they were occurring with greater frequency. And they began to be followed for several days by the same symptoms, albeit to a lesser degree, almost as if they were tapering off in intensity until I felt normal once more. Linda began to notice I was also having short term memory loss as well.

So, in 2020, I took action and began to seek answers. I first went to a neurologist who did an EEG (electroencephalogram) and found nothing untoward and referred me to a psychologist. She just felt it 'was all in my head.' That soured me to seeing another neurologist. I spent a year seeing an integrative doctor and doing monthly neuro feedback exercises. At the end he said, "Let's just hope they don't happen again."

But I didn't give up on my search.

I went to a cardiologist since I was told it might have something to do with not getting sufficient blood to my brain. Made sense. Hey, I'm no doctor. Long story short, turns out I had developed atrial fibrillation. I'm now dealing with A-fib.

This year I also began using a CPAP. For the uninitiated, it simply helps you get sound, restorative sleep. Let me tell you, it's made a world of difference. I cannot describe how transformative it's been. Science shows people our age need 7-8 hours of sound sleep each night.

All of this aside, the 'episodes' continued and I was advised to see another neurologist. Really? After my first experience? Really?

Well, this one spent over an hour and a half with me, listening and making notes. At the end of the appointment, she looked up and asked me, "you know what you're telling me, don't you?" My wife and I practically blurted out "No! We've been looking for answers for nearly 5 years. What is it?"

She said it was a textbook description of temporal lobe epilepsy. She admitted she was a cognitive neurologist and that this was only her theory but wanted me to see an epileptologist...a neurologist specializing in epilepsy to confirm her diagnosis.

I did so and spent 3 uncomfortable days and nights hooked up to an EEG. They actually induced a brain seizure (a professional description of what I had been calling 'episodes') and were able to confirm the diagnosis as left temporal lobe epilepsy. Left ignored or untreated, these seizures can spread throughout the brain and can increase in frequency. By the way, I have no family history of this, no previous head injury, nothing to predict this. I've learned that 25% of cases know no source. I've also learned that statistically, 1 in 26 people will have some form of epilepsy in their life (Epilepsy Foundation). I'm now working closely with the epileptologist to deal with this.

For me, there are 5 important components of good health:

1. Diet - preferably a Mediterranean diet. But I try to stay away from sugar, processed foods and alcohol.
2. Exercise - walking a couple miles a day at the very least but better to integrate daily workouts or cardio and light weights. I swim 1,000 yards 2-3 times a week and workout with weights and cardio on

alternative days. I also love to ski but with A-fib, I now stick to gentler slopes.



3. Sound, Restorative sleep each night.

4. A strong, positive, uplifting social / family circle.

5. Keep my mind active and engaged. For me it's music, reading and writing. I meditate each morning and shy away from cynical, argumentative stuff. I try to reduce stress.

Epilepsy is a "risk factor" for Alzheimer's and dementia. So, I'm under no illusions of where this could lead. That said, I've learned that in the same way it trains itself to having more frequent seizures, the brain - that amazing gift from God - can actually retrain itself to grow used to having no seizures.

The message? While these ailments, A-fib and epilepsy, are serious, point is I'm not ignoring them. I'm addressing them. Don't be among those who give up and say 'Oh, it's just goes with growing old.' LISTEN to what your body is telling you and then, TAKE ACTION. There are so many resources from which you can learn.

You are your own best advocate.