

Find out about haemochromatosis before it escalates

It is easy to fob-off tiredness and aching joints as symptoms of hard physical work rather than the consequence of a genetic condition that hoards iron in your body and erodes vital organs.

Running the family automotive business in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, for over 30 years meant James Barclay spent long hours on his feet, standing on concrete, and often felt tired.

Yet it was after James' daughter Jess was diagnosed with haemochromatosis that attention turned to where the genes appeared in the family tree and he was retrospectively diagnosed at age 54.

As soon as James had the excess iron removed from his body through regular 500 ml venesections (blood donations) his symptoms of joint pain and fatigue improved.

But sadly, subsequent testing revealed the excess iron accumulated in James' body for decades had damaged his liver. He was diagnosed with cirrhosis and liver cancer and has been undergoing cancer treatment for the past two years.

James and his wife Anne are speaking out about their experience so that others can learn from it. They want you to find out if you are the one in 200 Australians with haemochromatosis so you can be treated early and avoid complications.

"If we had our time over, we would find out earlier before irreversible damage was done. That's why we want others to find out if they have haemochromatosis by asking to be tested for it," Anne said.

"Men need to be more proactive with our health and not just dismiss symptoms as being caused by gout or old age or hard work," James said.

In hindsight, James should have been diagnosed decades earlier to avoid health complications, but he and Anne believe in the power of positive thinking and have destressed their life on a small farm outside Wagga while James has cancer treatment.

Haemochromatosis Australia president Dr Dianne Prince said a social media campaign raising awareness about the inherited iron-overload condition is under way, with people like James and Anne telling their stories.

Dr Prince said that while haemochromatosis can be tricky to diagnose, it is easy to test, simple to treat but tragic to ignore.

"James and Anne have an important story to share and we thank them for being part of our ***Iron out your health*** awareness campaign," she said.

To find out if you might be rusting from within and need to iron out your health, visit the Haemochromatosis Australia website ha.org.au or view the awareness campaign videos here <https://www.youtube.com/user/HaemochromatosisAust> or on social media channels.

Key points:

- Haemochromatosis is the most common genetic disorder in Australia
- If you are the 1 in 200 affected, it can cause serious health problems
- Ask your doctor, find out if you are storing too much iron