My Hepatitis C Treatment Journey - Week 4 is Here

May 7, 2015 By Matt Starr

For those of you following my journey with the newest hepatitis C medicines, Harvoni and ribavirin, you probably know I have three weeks behind me. Ribavirin is the harsh, anemia-producing medicine, but with 3 weeks down, the course has only 9 weeks remaining. Harvoni continues another 3 months, but that medicine is more benign. While there is a lot of hope for all of us, I have braced myself for the predicted anemia.

The anemia should be, by all accounts, kicking in by now. However, at this point, I feel great. Granted, the amount this week of the dreaded ribavirin is 65% of the full dose, and increases every week. Maybe the less than full strength dose is why I still feel good, but a big part of me senses there is more at work here.

I take great care of myself. The mindset of my life of athletic training helps me apply consistency and dedication to this current challenge. I have a long list of self-healing practices. I won't go deeply into all of the details, but they basically involve these broad categories: eating healthy, liver-friendly food; doing peaceful and heart-opening practices; exercising as my body allows, enjoying activities like gardening that I am passionate about, and cultivating a positive attitude.

My diet has been focused on foods that are good for my liver. This is not a diet per se, but a way of eating that is low on sodium, and high on fresh, pesticide-free, healthy food. Lots of fruit, vegetables, like dark leafy greens, some occasional grass-fed beef, fish; whole grains, and barely any junk foods (but my weakness for tortilla chips rears up now and then).

I am tempted by the benefits of Ayurveda, paleo, and macrobiotic diets. But honestly, for me, the strict list of what to eat and what not to eat is not practical, mostly because my family is not interested. I'd have to shop, cook, and even eat alone. The recipes are often complicated for a guy who likes to roast a chicken, grill some wild salmon or a burger, toss together a salad, steam vegies or stir fry them with brown rice, have fresh cooked beans at the ready, and make green and fruit smoothies. Here on our small Vermont farm we have access to most of that food, but if you do not have that luxury, there are many good co-ops, CSA's (community-supported agriculture), and farmers' markets in most towns and cities.

As well as eating liver-friendly food, getting outside to walk or move in any way I can is not only healthy for my body but also for my mind. I love my yoga practice, which is both physical and peaceful, as I breathe in asana, connecting with life. Meditation and prayer that further opens me to God and healing Spirits is enormously nourishing, comes in many forms.

Finally, I am blessed to have an outstanding local health clinic that provides me with weekly acupuncture, monthly chiropractic work, homeopathy, and a few herbs and guidance from my friend and talented naturopath. These alternative medicines and practices are all good for my liver and my body. Along with my caring medical team at our local hospital, I can maintain a solid healthy foundation in spite of liver disease.

Is it just blind luck that has kept me clear of side effects so far? Is it because of the half dose I've been on? Or, is it my consistent dedication to self-care from the inside out? Something tells me all my work is paying off, but check with me a month from now. I know I will endure whatever comes my way, while still eating my kale, spinach smoothies, broccoli and beans.
I'll keep you posted each week. I hope you find some kernels of how to love the life you live and be strong through the challenges.

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