



# Do I Look Like Do I Have Diabetes?

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***George H Croy can climb two steps at a time and looks hale and hearty. Yet this sixty-something life member of Diabetic Society of Singapore has type 2 diabetes and a problem he cannot control. He talks about the stumbling blocks he faces and the need for understanding.***

I had an inkling that something was wrong when I was called into the doctor's office to discuss my annual insurance health check. I had been extremely fit all along – my chickenpox, at aged six, lasted one day. Apart from that, I had no major illnesses. So, I was devastated when the doctor suspected I had diabetes.

Perhaps the diagnosis was an inevitable pronouncement. Both my mother and my maternal grandfather had diabetes. I remember my grandfather as this rotund, pipe-smoking gentleman, grossly overweight, with a penchant for chocolate. His daughter, my mother, was so enormous that I, standing at five feet nine inches, could not put my arms around her. I was a bit overweight myself, but nowhere near those dimensions (you don't play grade 3 squash and live to tell the tale if you are).

That was 10 years ago. I had just returned from a very busy schedule in China, where my most gracious hosts insisted on wining and dining me, every night for nearly two months. So I figured that the test results probably had more to do with my recent lifestyle than anything else. In this state of denial, I went to the clinic to see the doctor. Further tests confirmed the insurance doctor's results. I had late onset type 2 diabetes.

For how long? It was anybody's guess.

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Suitably supplied with Glipizide and Metformin, and the dietician's words ringing in my ears, I was sent on my way with instructions to lose weight. That I did. I was so terrified of this diabetes threat that I lost 15kg in six weeks (by the way, this is not recommended.) I was also given Simvastatin because of my high triglyceride count. Later, I was put on Losartan because of my blood pressure.

Sometimes it hits you. Like the time, when I attended a lecture at Singapore University on the effects of smoking on diabetics. When I came out of the theatre, I took my cigarettes and lighter, scrunched them up and threw them into the nearest litter bin. I had been a one-pack-a-day smoker for almost 40 years but if diabetes was going to get me, I wasn't going to give it any help.

Even to this day, I find myself swinging from disbelief to denial. How could I have diabetes? Apart from the painful fingertips from all the blood tests I do every day, I have no outward signs



of this terrible disease. My ECG is fine. I climb the MRT steps two at a time. My kidney function is good and I look after my feet well. As for my retinoscopy, my eyes have not deteriorated one

bit since the test. I do have Erectile Dysfunction (ED) but that could well be due to my age as I am almost in my mid-60s.

Yet, there are subtle signs that something is amiss. One thing I find very difficult to explain to my family and friends, without sounding like I am asking for sympathy, is my habit of stumbling - on the carpet and on the pavement. It is not that I cannot walk properly. I tell my feet to pick up, but for some reason the message does not get through and I hit the carpet sooner than expected. It is like stubbing your toe on a kerb. I do that as well sometimes when climbing the stairs - suddenly I am pitching forward because my foot does not manage to clear the height.

If I wish to change direction, I am often unable to do it efficiently

- I want to go left, but my body continues on the same path, so that I start to keel over. I am thinking "turn", but my feet are not listening. I frequently bump into things even when I move to avoid them. I miss the manoeuvre by inches and hit what I try to avoid - the chair, the table, or even the wall. Perhaps I should mention that I never could walk slowly. I stride out all the time. So sometimes I end up looking inebriated.

But the worst side effect, one which is very hard for others to understand, is that for some inexplicable reason I suddenly feel very tired. I come home from work and walk through the front door all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, but in the next half hour or so, despite my intentions of getting some work done, all I want to do is to lie down and sleep. It is almost as if my body has switched off.

It is not sympathy that I want. I am hoping for understanding. Generally, the non-diabetic public does not seem to fully understand the problems faced by the diabetes patient. I hope that events like World Diabetes Day will help the general public understand that diabetes is a lot more than just amputations and blindness. Diabetics suffer from many other seemingly unconnected problems as well. Through proper education, the public should learn more about what it is like to be diabetic and do everything possible to avoid this disease.