

## **Too much iron 'not good'**

By Prince George Free Press

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Jim Owen's first sign something was wrong was fatigue.

Then came arthritis symptoms – pain in his left leg and joints in two fingers.

At first he tried to explain away the problems.

"I had a been a lineman on the Prairies and spent years in karate clubs so I thought that this was the price you paid for those kind of activities," he said. "I had been to several doctors who found elevated iron levels and I thought that was good."

It was not good. Years later, Owen found that out when he was diagnosed with hereditary hemochromatosis, which causes iron to build up in organs and tissues. The iron deposits then accumulate and can cause serious damage, disease and even early death.

"This is a genetic disorder where the body's not able to metabolize iron, so the excess iron builds up in the organs and causes all kinds of symptoms. I was first diagnosed in 2002 but I'd had problems for several years before that."

Owen credits his Kamloops doctor, from South Africa, as the one who first keyed in on his problem.

"He was very familiar with hemochromatosis and so when I explained my symptoms, he ordered a genetic test and found it."

There is no cure for hemochromatosis, explained Owen, but the disorder can be managed by giving blood donations or phlebotomies so that the body draws the excess iron out of the organs to produce new blood cells.

Owen moved here from Terrace with his family a year and a half ago. These days Owen is donating blood to the Canadian Blood Services – his blood is not affected by his hemochromatosis – and he monitors the ferritin (protein that binds to iron) levels in his body.

"This impacted me more before my diagnosis because I didn't know what was wrong," he said. "I kept having more and more symptoms. The real problems start when the damage progresses with the liver and pancreas.

"So it's important for people to go to the doctor about symptoms. Many people still don't know about hemochromatosis, so you have to be your own advocate."

Early diagnosis is key.

Symptoms include chronic fatigue, loss of body hair, thyroid problems, sudden weight loss, elevated liver enzymes, enlarged liver, bronzing or graying of skin, arthritis and joint pain, and more.

Bob Rogers, CEO of the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society, will be speaking at a public information session on April 29 at the Civic Centre. The group will also have an information booth at the Home Show on April 26 to 28.

For more information and support, visit the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society website at [www.toomuchiron.ca](http://www.toomuchiron.ca).

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