

Let's 'listen' to our body

IT started with a ticklish or itchy feeling in his throat, followed by frequent coughing, something most of us would dismiss or put down to the weather.

Eventually, he was unable to lie flat due to the discomfort. This resulted in weeks of interrupted sleep, and the only way Lin Yee Neng could get any rest was to position himself sideways with his head propped up, a rather uncomfortable position to sleep.

Breathing became increasingly difficult, and his voice became hoarse and fainter by the day. That was Lin's status at the end of 2022. He was only 26 years old.

Lin was eventually diagnosed with high-grade fibromyxoid sarcoma on his right neck, a rare form of soft tissue cancer that can affect different parts of the body, such as the arms, legs, abdomen, head and neck.

It is characterised by the formation of a solitary firm mass that can be difficult to detect, and is often misdiagnosed as other types of tumours.

Due to its rarity and complexity, treating it is challenging for medical professionals.

His case was further complicated by the rapid growth of the tumour, which was compressing his airway, causing difficulty in breathing, and therefore, requiring urgent surgery.

For Lin, the treatment that offered the best chance to a cure was surgery to remove the tumour followed by radiotherapy. No other form of treatment by itself could control the disease effectively.

"Advanced imaging showed that the tumour had encased and compressed the carotid artery, which provides the main blood supply to the brain.

"The cancerous tumour had also displaced and compressed his airway. The tumour even extended down into his chest, reaching the level of the arch



Lin Yee Neng is thankful for his recovery and his experience has taught him how precious good health is.

of the aorta close to his heart," says Subang Jaya Medical Centre consultant ENT, head and neck, thyroid and parathyroid surgeon Dr Eng Chee Yean.

There were significant risks due to the proximity of the tumour to major nerves, blood vessels, the airway and the heart.

A failed surgery could mean a coma, stroke, permanent dependence on a breathing machine or even death.

But despite these challenges and the inherent risks of treatment, Lin and his family were determined to fight the cancer. After meticulous planning and informed consent, Lin proceeded

to have the surgery.

Despite the complex nature of the case, Lin displayed tremendous courage and eventually underwent a successful surgical procedure to remove the tumour without any complications. He is now going through post-operative radiotherapy.

"For me, the greatest relief was that I could lie down flat again. It's the little things that we take for granted."

His experience has also taught him that life should be lived to the fullest. He plans to travel to Japan once he's fully recovered.

His story also serves as a lesson to others that we need to "listen" to our

Get a check-up if you feel there are signs that all is not right with your body.

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body and be aware of the signs that something may not be right with your health.

It could be something as simple as a cough that doesn't subside, a fever that keeps coming on and off, or pain in places where we normally don't feel pain.

Ignoring these symptoms, especially when they are persistent or increasing in severity, could mean allowing a disease to take control.

"If you sense something is wrong with your body, don't wait. Get it checked. You never know how much time you have left," says Lin.

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