

Chris Grosz: The high costs of gum disease



Diabetes
New Zealand



Having gum disease has resulted in long-term, expensive treatment for Chris Grosz. He makes it clear that managing your diabetes can save social and personal costs as well as dental expenses.



Chris, who lives in Whitford near Auckland, is a political and editorial cartoonist. He teaches cartooning at a private school and is also an artist, focusing on historical narrative and colonial history.

After being based in Melbourne for 30 years, Chris returned to New Zealand a year ago. 'My sister, Sue, has Type 1 diabetes. My Type 2 diabetes is a result of a life of decadence and a genetic marker. I partied in the '80s and was diagnosed in

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1999. I wasn't active enough, I drank and I smoked. The genetic marker made me at risk of diabetes at some time, but the partying brought it on sooner.

'I ignored the diabetes diagnosis and travelled on gaily with my life. My constant urination should have given me a clue. Two years later, my vision went while I was driving. My gums started shrinking but I didn't associate that with my diabetes.'

Chris had atrophy of the upper jaw, multiple abscesses, wobbly teeth and bad breath. 'Everyone is too nice to say anything about your bad breath. Your mouth also looks shocking, so people don't look at you properly when they are talking to you. My doctor told me if I didn't do something about managing my diabetes I would be dead in a year.

'I immediately changed my diet and started to do at least 30 minutes of activity a day. I have a firm routine and walk for half an hour.

'In Melbourne, life revolves around food and I was eating out for every meal. I cut out desserts but have found it easier to eat better back here.'

Chris smoked cigarettes until 1991 and then changed to cigars. He had great difficulty with stopping smoking completely. 'In the end I got tired of waking up smelling like an ashtray and I just stopped. There was no other way to do it.'

Taking part in the Diabetes New Zealand video, *Staying on Top - An Introduction to Living with Type 2 Diabetes* enabled Chris to pass on what he has learnt to others. 'Gum disease is a severe condition that is a direct result of not managing your diabetes. As well as losing your teeth, bacteria can get into your bloodstream, which puts you in danger of heart attacks, strokes and even dementia.'

Two operations so far have started the process to restore his gums and teeth. 'I've had bone slurry transplanted from my hip to my jaw. When the bone grows back, I'll have titanium implants. This is all done privately and will cost \$26,000 to \$30,000. My family has gathered round to help as I wouldn't have been able to stand that cost.

'Eat well, be active and stop smoking so your teeth don't get to the shocking condition mine were in. If diabetes is in your family but you haven't had a test yet, go and have a check for diabetes.'

Chris also has some strong words for the Government. 'It should be more recognised that gum disease is a severe complication of diabetes. There is no co-ordination amongst the various agencies for developing strategies to overcome the problems diabetes causes. It's time for some tough stuff to get the messages across.'