

Haemochromatosis information meeting in Tullamore

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The Irish Haemochromatosis Association (IHA) is hosting a meeting in the Bridge House Hotel in Tullamore on October 17 for local sufferers of the condition.

Haemochromatosis is a genetic disorder where the body absorbs excessive iron. If untreated, this excessive iron burden leads to impaired organ function and eventually to disease and organ failure.

As iron naturally builds up slowly, often people are in their 30s or 40s before they start to display symptoms, the most common of which are chronic fatigue, joint pain, diabetes, irregular heart beat, enlarged liver and loss of sex drive.

Haemochromatosis, which is often dubbed the Celtic Curse, is more common in Ireland than any other country with one in 83 people having the condition.

Although it can cause serious damage to a person's organs if undiagnosed, if detected early Haemochromatosis responds well to treatment. The only method of removing excess iron from the body is by removal of blood. This is done by giving a blood donation and is called venesection or phlebotomy therapy. Mullingar's Rita Tynan was diagnosed with the condition 18 years ago. She believes that her early diagnosis is the reason why she has been able to maintain a high quality of life.

"About 15 years ago I began to notice that I was fatigued. Instinctively I knew that something wasn't quite right. I made a conscious effort to exercise more and to have a better lifestyle so it surprised me that I didn't feel more energetic. The way it affected me was that I would suddenly feel a loss of energy or sometimes as the day went on I'd feel that I had to lie down.

I was fortunate that I went to my GP and they ran a series of tests, which included a check on my iron status."

Today, Rita has blood removed three times a year. People who have been recently diagnosed may need weekly treatment until their iron levels have been sufficiently reduced.

"Because I was diagnosed at an early stage, fortunately I didn't get other complications. Early diagnosis is very important."

The October 17 meeting in the Bridge House Hotel starts at 7.30pm. The main speaker at the event is Dr Gerard Crotty, Consultant Haematologist at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore.

For more information on the condition, visit the IHA website at www.haemochromatosis-ir.com