

Putting Out the Flames of Muscle Disease

“I had never missed a day of work in 40 years,” says 61-year-old Walter Reilly of South Brunswick Township. “Never been sick. Last summer, though, I started getting very weak, out of breath, and I didn’t have a clue what was wrong.”

Walter was experiencing rapidly increasing muscle weakness and pain, weight loss, and shortness of breath, despite his years of routine workouts at the gym. The pain and weakness had become so great by August that Walter couldn’t walk 50 feet without stopping and gasping for air.

In early September, Walter saw Aly Cohen, MD, board-certified rheumatologist with Integrative Rheumatology Associates in Monroe. Within 10 minutes of reviewing Walter’s blood work and medical history, Dr. Cohen knew he was suffering from an inflammatory muscle disease, most likely polymyositis.

Inflammatory muscle diseases are characterized by chronic muscle inflammation accompanied by muscle weakness. Often, complaints include fatigue after standing or walking, tripping or falling, and difficulty swallowing or breathing, as the muscle inflammation is focused on the trunk area of the body.

Although there is no known cause for this family of diseases, suspected agents are allergic reactions, exposure to toxic substances or medicines, or underlying health concerns such as cancer, rheumatic conditions or viruses.



Aly Cohen, MD, board-certified rheumatologist

Walter’s muscle enzymes were so high that Dr. Cohen had to start treatment immediately.

“We’re talking about a real progression,” Dr. Cohen reports. “Within four weeks, Walter couldn’t really walk down the hallway.”



Walter Reilly is back at work after treatment cured an inflammatory muscle disease.

She scheduled a muscle biopsy for Walter at CentraState Medical Center with Viswanath Ashok, MD, board-certified surgeon with Central Jersey Associates and on staff at CentraState, whom she had worked with in the past.

“I have a lot of go-to physicians who have been very conscientious about how quickly and well they get things done,” Dr. Cohen says.

The biopsy confirmed her diagnosis.

After undergoing the muscle biopsy, Walter took his first dose of prednisone, a steroid that reduces inflammation. By the next morning, Walter reported that all of his pain was gone. In recent months, Walter has tapered his use

of prednisone and has returned to the gym. He is now working out with very light weights, slowly building up his muscles once again, and is increasing his cardiovascular endurance.

“I’m convinced that Dr. Cohen saved my life,” Walter says. “I was very fortunate to find her. And she won’t even take credit for that. ‘This is my job,’ she said.”

Walter has returned to work at his firm, Reilly’s Collision Center. “I’m working outside on a diesel truck like I did when I was 35 years old,” he says.

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