

Arthritis Doesn't Discriminate.

Over 1000 children in New Zealand are living with arthritis.

If you didn't know this you are not alone, most New Zealanders are unaware of this fact.

Nelson's 18 year old James Lowe is well aware of the fact that arthritis doesn't discriminate between the ages. He was diagnosed with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) only a few years ago.

In October 2007, James returned home from playing cricket with a rash.

When James, who was normally extremely active, became increasingly lethargic, his parents took him to a doctor who then referred him onto a rheumatologist.

The rheumatologist ran blood tests and James was diagnosed with JIA.

By February 2008, James's symptoms had all but disappeared and James made the Nelson Boys Colleges 1st XV rugby team for the first time.

Unfortunately for James, his symptoms returned with vengeance in May 2008 that lasted through till July, but after being prescribed prednisone (which is a type of corticosteroid medication) the arthritis symptoms appeared to be under control.

But in December 2008, James's arthritis flared up with a vengeance. He could hardly walk on Christmas Day which had a huge impact on a chap whose life revolves around being active.

The worse was still to come. In February 2009, James was hospitalised for several days.

James's specialist Dr Porter, started James on enbrel (Etanercept) injections and James began to show swift improvement. After six weeks of having the injections, James was back on the playing field.

James's father Geoff Lowe, is incredibly thankful to Dr Porter: "When James was at his worse, he could only spend two hours at school and at times because the school was on a hill, James would fall and his mates would have to help pick him up."



"No one knew kids could get arthritis."

"Thanks to Dr Porter for putting James on the injections, he now feels 100% with no side effects and is full on."

James, under the influence of his grandfather, also takes complementary treatments to keep him healthy including Omega-3 and a joint supplement.

This year saw James contribute to the New Zealand School Boys rugby team beating their Australian counterparts by scoring one of three tries and he has just been signed by Tasman

Rugby Union for two years.

On hearing James's story of determination and success, Arthritis New Zealand couldn't resist the temptation to fly James up to meet an established rugby star with arthritis, All Black Neemia Tialata.

Neemia, who is an official ambassador for Arthritis New Zealand, and has osteoarthritis in his knees, took young James under his wing and introduced him to the team at the Captain's Run before the Vodafone Wellington Lions took on Taranaki. James was also allowed to sit on the bench with the rest of the team at the game.

Sandra Kirby, Chief Executive of Arthritis New Zealand, was delighted that the two elite sports people got an opportunity to meet: "This occasion helps highlight how arthritis can strike anyone, regardless of age or fitness. It also illustrates that having arthritis doesn't relegate people to the sidelines of life."

Arthritis New Zealand continues to try to break down the common misconception that arthritis is an 'old person's disease' and hopes that by having a rising rugby star and rugby legend like James and Neemia as official ambassadors, it will help strengthen this message.