

It's Probably Nothing

Category: Awaiting a Diagnosis

written by Beatriz Sousa | August 4, 2025

As a third-year medical student, I'm used to being tired and stressed, and like many of us in training, I tend to neglect my own health. "It's probably nothing," I told myself. "I'm overthinking it. Illness anxiety disorder."

But I'd always been unusually sensitive to cold. Since childhood, my hands and feet would freeze, turning pale, numb, sometimes bluish. I thought it was just a quirky trait. Then I learned about Raynaud's phenomenon in class, and my classmates and I joked: "You totally have that."

Still, it took me months to see a doctor. Between rotations and studying, there was never time. Or maybe I was afraid. My dad has ankylosing spondylitis, and I knew Raynaud's could be linked to autoimmune disease. I didn't want to open that door.

Eventually, the episodes became more frequent. Just pulling a cold drink from the fridge could set them off. I finally saw a rheumatologist. He recognized it right away: Raynaud's. But the question lingered: was it primary, or a sign of something more serious?

Waiting for the test results was agonizing. I couldn't concentrate. Every ache became suspicious. Every symptom felt loaded. I imagined chronic illness, years of medications, limitations I hadn't prepared for.

When the labs came back normal, I was relieved, but also frustrated. "Idiopathic Raynaud's," the doctor said. "Just avoid cold." That's it?

How do you avoid cold in a hospital where the AC is always cranked up? Am I supposed to wear gloves all the time? It seemed ridiculous, and yet not doing it made the symptoms worse. I found myself becoming one of those "noncompliant" patients I once judged.

That experience shifted something in me. Chronic conditions don't just test your body; they test your patience, your identity, your willingness to adapt. I now understand that "lifestyle changes" aren't simple. They're hard. And they demand empathy from those of us who prescribe them.

So here I am, wearing touchscreen gloves as I type, still learning to live with my (thankfully) not so serious condition. But in that process, I've gained something medical school alone couldn't teach: the understanding that health isn't just about lab results or clear-cut diagnoses. It's about navigating the uncertainty, the daily frustrations, the quiet adjustments no one sees.

And when I become the doctor on the other side of the conversation, I hope I remember what it felt like to wait, to worry, to hope it's nothing, and to still need someone to treat you like it's something that matters.

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