

My Fat Foot Is the Stupidest Symptom of Brain Cancer

Or is it, asks Glioblastology blogger Adam Hayden as he contemplates painting his walker and wheels.

September 11, 2025 By [Adam Hayden](#)

My neighbor apologized later about the foot comment.

Totally unnecessary apology, but very much appreciated.

According to an astrology section in the back of the weekly Valu Pac, by the Denny's \$2.99 Grand Slam and the coupon for a free TV with a test drive at the Ford place, my sign holds grudges until eternity. This was my left Bauer to Whitney's right when she read, "Leos hold grudges until they're in the ground," or something like this. I don't actually think that's what it said, but I'm the writer of this post.

That was said in support of the apology, but in an intentionally comedic way.

The truth is that I've never experienced much self-confidence and people pleasing or perfecting, my two learned modes, I assume I'm under constant judgment.

That's an internally inconsistent mode, if you think about it: low confidence yet fear of perpetual scrutiny. Like. I'm supposed to be insignificant enough that no one notices me but somehow important enough that I am the focus of everyone's judgment.

This is why we have therapists.

I was grateful for the apology, not because of eternal grudges; yes, something to do with how self-conscious I seem to be about everything, but mostly because the fat foot is another paper cut to tally by which we die upon reaching 1,000.

See, I'm on a daily dose of steroids that we started during radiation therapy to help with the related edema. Headaches, for my presentation anyway, are the worst parts about brain swelling. The efficacy of the steroid controlling this symptom is profound. Steroids are a tool, like chemo, like stool softeners, like hammers, and Kitchen Aid mixers. It's a rare but real attitude among cancer patients: we often try not to use our tools.

I want to taper off the steroids

I don't think I need to stay at this anti-epilepsy dose

I'll take a Zofran tomorrow if I still feel bad, but I'm going to try not to.

I don't know if it's some American Puritanical Culture or a poorly conceived morality that ties relief to moral failing and suffering to virtue, but whatever the reason, I'm always trying to be a hero in my own cancer care.

Steroids?! Who needs 'em!

But I do need them.

So I take them.

I am "compliant."

An "adherent patient."

The language has evolved.

Using steroids, even at a low dose, carries side effects. Here's one of my strange ones: Because my brain hasn't been able to effectively communicate with my left leg in about a decade, that leg has become weak with some muscle atrophy. This is now a physical thing, yes, but it began neurologically. The large tumor, then the surgical removal, and two rounds of radiation in eight years, have interfered with my brain locking in with my left leg.

Low-dose steroids and an atrophied leg, something about circulation, my left foot swells.

The fat foot.

With that very impairment we just discussed and a foot that may be a half size or so bigger, wrestling a shoe on that foot is an effort.

More papercuts.

I guess I would be so lucky as to be living with brain cancer and complain in this moment only about swollen limbs and stubborn sneakers, but that's the inside baseball of chronic illness: few parts of life remain unscathed.

The fat foot is the stupidest symptom.

Or is it?

What if it were the most significant?

I mean. It's not. Objectively.

It's sort of a running joke: Adam has shoes and hats. I like to accessorize, I guess. I take care of my sneakers, and I've been copping new pairs for years. I like a brand of crew sock, I like these joggers I have in a couple colors, and I know which sneakers look best with which sock jogger combo.

This is me.

You have a you, I'm sure.

And that doesn't mean your thing includes shoes or fashion, but it's an activity, a specific drive, an instrument, a book series, or whatever, a thing that brings you back to you.

I wore Levi's, Chucks, and a black hoodie to pre-op. I traded in those clothes for a hospital gown. My street clothes were thrown in a plastic bag with draw strings to close, and my last name was scribbled on the front. I ended up inpatient in two different hospitals, and I remember opening that bag the day I would get a short trip out of the hospital with Whitney to go get my diagnosis at the Neuroscience Center.

I had been in hospital gowns for weeks.

I managed to pull on the Levi's. I wrestled on those Chuck Taylors, trying not to fall out of my wheelchair, setting off the wheelchair alarm.

I returned to me for a few hours.

"You do you." was the advice I gave on a podcast years ago when asked about my best advice for serious illness or hospital stays or something.

Not only the fat foot but the whole leg thing, and the balance thing, all worse after radiation (but the tumor is stable) require more tools. Now, a walker and a return to my wheelchair.

I've really been trying to put off use of the walker. It looks so institutional.

The other day in the car, Whitney said, "What if I paint the walker matte black and you put band stickers all over it? Then will you use the walker?" The truth is, it still sits in the garage. I'm making due with the cane when I can, but the wheelchair is definitely the hookup when I can get over my own foolish self-perception.

Gideon's soccer team had a "Kids v. Parents" game the other night. It kills me not to be able to be out there parent side. I suck at soccer, but I played a little, and I can receive a pass. When I was at my best health post surgery, before the recurrence, I would play soccer with Gideon every day after school.

I really, really miss those afternoons. Last time I did that I ate it pretty hard, and gave myself a pretty bad cut on my knee (and ripped the knee of my Levis, which was actually okay).

I was proud when a lifelong best friend stepped up at the last minute to be Gid's stand-in dad for the match, while I watched on with a huge smile from my wheelchair on the sideline.

Sitting in the wheelchair, you can really see the jogger-sock-sneaker combo, and with crew length, you almost don't even notice the swelling.

I don't know, friends.

Wrestle on your shoes. Paint your walker. No shade about rolling.

It's what I'm working on.

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<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/fat-foot-stupidest-symptom-brain-cancer-glioblastoma-walker-wheels>