

Chris Plays Basketball



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Illustrations by Nina Laden

Chris loves basketball. It's his favorite sport. Some days he plays three or four times. He practices alone a lot of the time, and tonight is no different. He's shooting hoops when his Mom calls him in for dinner.

“Be right there,” Chris replies. At the far end of his driveway, he sets the scene. “. . .down by one, ten seconds left, Chris Johnson dribbles to his left, 6 seconds, 5, 4, he fakes right, 3, 2, he shoots” . . . swish . . . “he scores! And the crowd goes crazy, WHAAHHH.”

Chris heads in for dinner with his arms over his head and the roar of the crowd still in his ears.

As he washes up for dinner, his Mom gives him a pill and a glass of water. “Don't forget to take your medicine,” she says.

“Awww, Mom . . . how can I forget? You won't let me. Every day, twice a day, at breakfast and dinner you always remind me.”



Chris doesn't like having to take his pills because they're a constant reminder that he has Epilepsy. Chris wants to be like other 12-year-olds, but he isn't. He suffers from epileptic seizures. His doctor made it very clear that Chris's pills can help control his seizures. And he'll have more seizures, if he doesn't take his medicine. So Chris always takes his pills because if he takes care of himself, he can do anything he puts his mind to.

The phone rings and interrupts Chris's thoughts. It's for him.

"Hi Chris, it's Dr. Goodman. I just want to say one thing, good luck tomorrow at the basketball tryouts."

"Thanks, I'll need it." As Chris hangs up the phone, he thinks back to how he met Dr. Goodman.



Five months ago, Chris was a standout in basketball camp. The coaches had him playing with the varsity boys, not too bad for a boy just out of sixth grade. However, on the last day of camp, during the afternoon scrimmage, Chris didn't feel well. He was hot and tired, yet he stuck it out because the coaches were watching. Then it happened.

Chris felt dizzy and wandered off the court. Suddenly, he fell to the ground and shook with convulsions. The coaches were shocked. They didn't know what to do.

Chris was rushed to a hospital. He was scared, but he felt a little better when his family arrived. Together they met his new doctor.

Dr. Goodman arrived with a lot of questions for Chris and his parents. Chris didn't really remember what happened, so he didn't know what to say. But as he listened to his parents, Chris was surprised to learn he suffered a seizure once before, as a young boy.

So Dr. Goodman ordered some tests for Chris. And when the results came back, he told Chris that he had another seizure. And that he had Epilepsy. Chris and his family were worried until Dr. Goodman explained everything.



He said, “The easiest way to describe Epilepsy is to imagine a high-school band with the drummer beating at a different pace. When the drummer is drumming off beat, it can throw the rest of the band into confusion. That’s how a small area of Chris’s brain is behaving. One area is not in time with the rest of the brain. It is hyper-functioning or overworking. Most of the time, almost 99.9% of the time, the rest of the brain will control the small out of synch area, but when it doesn’t a seizure results.”

Chris asked, “What causes a seizure?”

Dr. Goodman said, “Unfortunately doctors aren’t exactly sure what causes Epilepsy. Sometimes it’s hereditary. Other times it’s caused by a head injury that affects the brain. We do know, however, that medication can help control the spread of this abnormal functioning. In a sense, medicine will control the drummer. But be aware that there may be times that the medicine may not be adequate.

“So remember, Chris, it works best if you eat three meals a day and get about eight hours of sleep a night.” Then Dr. Goodman added, “The most important thing I want you to remember is that with the proper medication, you can control your Epilepsy. And you can live a normal life.”



In the doctor's office it sounded easy: take your medicine, eat right and get enough sleep. But on that summer afternoon, Chris's life was turned upside-down. Things changed fast. His sudden seizure caught everyone by surprise, especially Chris. He was really embarrassed. That it happened in front of his friends only made it worse.

At first, Chris wanted to avoid everyone, but that didn't work because he missed his friends. So after discussing it with his parents, Chris decided to talk to his friends about Epilepsy. He knew it wouldn't be easy, but it was the right thing to do.

Chris's friends asked a lot of questions. And it's true, they were a little scared, but that was because they just didn't know any better. So Chris did his best to explain everything. In the end, most of Chris's friends understood, and soon it was like old times.

When Dr. Goodman said that he could play basketball again, that's all Chris did. He played basketball with his friends until they had to go home. And he played one-on-one with his brother until he got tired. Then Chris practiced shooting until dinner. Sometimes his dad would play after dinner.



When the summer was over and Chris went back to school, he was surprised by how many people knew about his seizure. It was a tough time for him. He felt like some people at school treated him a little different: some of his teachers, old friends, and even classmates that didn't see his seizure.

Though he had his good friends, Chris felt like wherever he went, someone wanted to tease him. And that hurt. So he did the only thing he could, he talked about it with his class.

With the help of his teacher, Chris explained Epilepsy. Everyone was real curious and in the end, his whole class was just as understanding as his friends were. A few classmates teased him, but he ignored them. They weren't worth getting upset about anyway. And after a few weeks, everything was back to normal at school.

Then basketball season rolled around and Chris had a big decision to make. It was his favorite time of the year and Chris wanted to be on the team. He was tired of playing basketball alone in his driveway. Chris wanted to be treated like everyone else. He decided to go to the basketball tryouts.



The night before the tryouts, Chris is glad that Dr. Goodman called to wish him luck. He thinks he'll need all the luck he can get to make varsity. Chris is a little nervous, but he's ready to try.

At the varsity tryouts, it's a challenge just for him to take the court. Some of the other boys don't want to play against him because they're afraid that they might get Epilepsy.

This time Coach knows what to do because Chris's parents called him and discussed his condition. And Coach understood immediately.

He knows how important basketball is to Chris. So he gathers the boys and explains everything he learned about Epilepsy. He uses the same high-school band example that Dr. Goodman told Chris's family. And he makes it clear that Epilepsy is definitely not contagious. Coach explains that although it doesn't happen often, if someone has a serious head injury, it's possible to get Epilepsy. And that fact really gets the boys' attention. So everyone is listening when Coach describes what to do in case Chris has a seizure.



Finally he stresses, “The most important thing is to prevent the person who is having a seizure from getting hurt. Remember, he’s your teammate.”

Coach saves the day. Chris gets his chance. And the long summer of practice pays off. He makes the team! His new varsity teammates welcome him. And Chris is one of the best players.

The season’s first game is against the division champs. As the big game starts, Chris sits on the bench. But soon one of the starters gets into foul trouble. So, late in the first half, with his team down by ten points, Chris gets his chance. As he enters the game there are a few cheers, but Chris ignores them.

Chris came to play. He worked long and hard to get here. And nothing will stop him from proving himself now. His hustle and defense spurs the team to go on a scoring run that leaves the score tied at the half.

Coach credits him for his hard play, but doesn’t start Chris in the second half. And the team struggles. They’re not in synch and quickly fall behind. Coach’s decision is easy, and Chris goes back in the game. And this time, Chris hears more cheers from the crowd. Again, he ignores the crowd and concentrates on the game.



With Chris back in the game, the momentum changes. Inspired by his hustle, the team starts a comeback. With less than thirty seconds left, the defending champs lead by one point. And after a time-out, the champs try to run out the clock, but Chris steals the ball.

Down by one with ten seconds left in the game, Chris dribbles to his left, 6 seconds, 5, 4, he fakes right, 3, 2, he shoots... swish... he scores! They win! They beat the defending champs at the buzzer. The crowd goes crazy and rushes the floor. What a game! What a finish!

After the game, the team celebrates with a pizza party. Chris couldn't be happier. He did it. He really did it. He helped the team win the game. And look at him now, Chris is part of the varsity team, just like he always wanted.

Chris can't help thinking about Dr. Goodman. He always says that if he takes care of himself, keeps a positive attitude and never gives up, he can do anything he wants. He smiles, because all Chris wants now is a lot more pizza parties like this one.



TRILEPTAL
(oxcarbazepine)

150•300•600 mg tablets 300 mg/5 mL oral suspension

