

Patterson family taking it one day at a time

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David Ritchie • Special

FAMILY TIME: Kari and Dave Patterson with Tucker and twin sister Avery (right) and big sister Tori.

Since learning their young son has a rare and fatal disease just five months ago, Kari and Dave Patterson have been determined to let others know more about Leigh's syndrome. But more than that, the Waterdown couple, with a wide circle of friends in the Burlington and Mississauga areas, has embarked on a mission to raise funds to support research into a cure or treatment for the disease that has robbed their son of his strength and balance since his birth two-and-a-half years ago.

Little Tucker Patterson – a twin to sister, Avery and young brother to four-year-old Tori – may be small in body but he's shown that he's full of heart. His mother said this week that his condition has worsened in recent months.

"His toes have curled, he's losing more mobility, especially on his left side, and his balance has also deteriorated," she reported. He has lost the ability to crawl and can only sit for short periods of time. Hardest of all is having him fed through a stomach tube that is hooked up to an IV; he is now on 24-hour feeds instead of just overnight.

He and his siblings have also come down with a virus that has hit Tucker the hardest because of his compromised immune system. He returned Sunday from a stay in McMaster Children's Hospital last weekend, but was re-admitted the following day. His mother said Tuesday that Tucker will have to stay "another night or two."

Leigh's syndrome, which affects one out of every 500,000 children, is caused by problems in the mitochondria, the tiny structures inside every body cell that use food and oxygen to make the energy needed by the body to develop and grow. In Tucker's case, it has caused a gradual deterioration in motor skills. Life expectancy is less than three years from onset of the disease.

"As horrific as the diagnosis is, they (Kari and Dave) have been able to come to terms with it and move forward in a positive way," family friend Lynda Newkirk Moore said this week. The Waterdown mother of two, who met Kari four years ago at Parent Link, a program offered for new mothers at the Flamborough YMCA, said she's amazed by the strength and determination shown by the couple.

"They've decided to celebrate the present and make every day special," she said.

The Pattersons have announced plans to pay tribute to their son by staging a fundraising dinner/dance for mitochondrial disease research, and Moore is happy to do her part to support them. "So many people contribute to the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Cancer Society, but it's much harder to collect for lesser known but equally devastating diseases," she said.

Tucker's Time Valentine's Dinner and Dance is slated to take place at 6:30 p. m., Friday, February 6 at the Grand Victorian Convention Centre in the Radisson Hotel, 175 Derry Road East, Mississauga.

The cost is \$60 per person, with \$20 from each ticket donated to the McMaster Children's Hospital's Neuromuscular Clinic for Mitochondrial Disease Research in tribute of Tucker Patterson. A charitable tax receipt for the \$20 donation will be available. Those unable to attend can make a donation; a tax receipt will be provided for any donation of \$20 or more.

Tickets for the event, both for individuals and groups, can be purchased until Sunday (February 1) by contacting the Pattersons by e-mail at kari@tuckerstime.com or by calling Tara Debruin of Ladies Choice Autocare at 905-524-9853 or Catherine Pocrnic at Sunvision Secrets Tanning Salon at 905-690-7866.

In October, the Pattersons and their children enjoyed a trip to Disneyland in Florida. "We all had a tremendous time," Kari said. She and her husband are hoping there'll be more family outings this year and that their fundraising efforts will one day lead to either a treatment or cure for mitochondrial diseases.

Dave Patterson is a full-time firefighter at Pearson Airport and a volunteer firefighter at the Waterdown station. Kari is a police officer in Peel Region.