

Did Tom Hanks expect to be diagnosed with Type Two Diabetes?

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Unfortunately, when ill-health strikes, it strikes indiscriminately, without regard to age, sex or social standing. Did Tom Hanks expect to be diagnosed with type two diabetes when he was busy being one of the world's highest paid actors? Probably not. Did Dick Cheney, former US Vice President, expect to suffer five heart attacks and survive? Almost certainly not.

Good health is something we often take for granted when we are young but, according to Cancer Research UK, if you were born in the UK after 1960, the odds are 50:50 that you will contract some form of cancer in your lifetime. Working as a professional in the life insurance industry, I find it surprising that people put off purchasing cover when faced with such odds. We are as likely to bet on an alien invasion as our own mortality, it appears.

I recently asked our medical underwriter to give me an indication of the terms that would be offered to five potential customers, each with a common illness, if they were to approach us for life insurance. I didn't reveal that these five people are in fact five global celebrities.

1. Asthma – David Beckham

It's a little known fact that David suffers with asthma. Given a healthy lifestyle and childhood onset of the disease, he may be able to secure standard premium rates. However, depending on the severity of his condition, he could even be declined, which may be a surprise to many given the routine incidence of such an illness. Our underwriter would need to weigh up positive features (like the fact that he is a non-smoker and treats his condition with inhalers) and negative features (any use of steroids or hospital admissions) to give an accurate assessment.

2. Type Two Diabetes – Tom Hanks

Tom, by his own admission, 'blindly kept dancing through the party' and paid the price. He may well have been able to avoid the condition through adopting a healthier lifestyle, which is not lost on me living in Dubai. Our underwriter would apply a loading (increase on standard premiums) to his policy, depending on a number of factors such as level of diabetes control, weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, family history and smoker status.

3. Heart attack (myocardial infarction) – Dick Cheney

Dick would find it a fruitless task trying to obtaining life cover today. Life insurers will generally decline cover following a second heart attack, or if the first attack occurs under the age of 40. It might have been possible to grant him terms 12 months after the first attack, however, had it not occurred at the relatively young age of 37.

4. High blood pressure – Kim Kardashian

Kim suffered from pre-eclampsia during her first pregnancy a condition characterised by high blood pressure, sometimes with fluid retention and proteinuria. Blood pressure of over 140/90 would be considered raised and will likely result in an additional premium loading being charged. Our underwriter would assess other cardiovascular risk factors, however, such as her weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, family history and smoker status.

5. Skin Cancer – Melanie Griffith

There has been a sizeable increase in the incidence of skin cancer over the past 20 years and Melanie is far from alone. Our underwriter would look to categorise a single melanoma in one of three ways: those contained to the top layer of her skin that have been surgically removed (standard terms), those that penetrate deeper into the skin (moderate premium loading) and those penetrating the subcutaneous tissue (decline).

Although they suffer vastly different illnesses, there is one fact that unites all these celebrities: all of them could be paying standard rates for life insurance today had they purchased a policy before they were diagnosed with their condition.

The best time to buy life cover (term insurance) is when you are young and healthy, even before you get married or have children or other liabilities, because once you purchase it, the premium is fixed and no adverse change in health will ever alter increase the price you pay. Put off buying term insurance and you face the very real prospect of paying sky-high premiums, or not being insurable at all – perhaps at the time your family needs it most.

Let's face it; it's a dead cert that we are all going to die someday. Alien invasion? Maybe, but hopefully not.

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