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Liam's battle with cystic fibrosis

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Liam Neil is spoilt rotten.

His parents Paul Neil and Nicola McCarthy admit they can't help it and don't really want to.

The energetic blond 22-month-old boy is the apple of his parent's eye. Perhaps a little smaller than his peers, he is chatty, bouncy and loves the original *Toy Story* movie.

"We smother him," says his father.

"He's spoilt. We let him get away with a lot."

Watching him play at home in Hawera – feeding his new kitten "Reow" treats, playing trains and snuggling with his mother, you would never guess his life is a jumble of specialist visits, physical therapy, and medications.

Taking nine tablets a day plus liquid vitamins, not including extras if he gets ill, Liam does special exercises twice a day and sees his specialist about every three weeks.

Liam has cystic fibrosis – a condition which causes excessive

hard-to-shift mucus on the lungs and results in poor pancreatic function.

Children like Liam are often admitted to hospital several times a year with serious lung infections, have to eat high-calorie diets to combat malnutrition and have a much shorter life expectancy.

His mother says it was hard when they found out, but tailoring their lives around Liam's added needs comes naturally now.

The family takes each day as it comes, since Miss McCarthy says they have no idea how Liam's condition will affect them in the future.

"There was definitely a grieving process," she says.

"A lot of people said stay away from the internet."

She credits the Cystic Fibrosis Association's Taranaki branch with helping them get through the early days.

"They are there if you need them."

A rambunctious personality, Liam is beginning to resist the barrage of medications he has to have each day as he grows, especially since baby brother



Busy bee: Liam Neil, 22 months old, gets into mischief by climbing up a couch.

Photo: PETRA FINER

Cooper, five months, doesn't have them, but Miss McCarthy says he is pretty relaxed most of the time.

"Because it started so young, he doesn't know the difference," she says.

Diagnosed at one month old via the compulsory newborn heelprick test, Liam's treatments began almost straight away.

"It's deceiving but in some ways that's a bonus, because he looks

this week, the Neil-McCarthy family is trying to sell 2000 chocolate fish and will man collection boxes around Hawera this week.

Cystic Fibrosis Awareness week ends on Sunday.

like any other child.

"Developmentally and mentally it doesn't have an impact. They might be smaller and underweight, but as far as faculties, they are fine."

Having direct contact with their specialist, whenever Liam gets ill the family heads straight to Taranaki Base Hospital for treatment.

"If bugs get into his lungs, there's a lot more mucus so it scars the lungs.

"The X-rays coming back now are typical of kids his age so that's a huge win for us."

Doing their bit for the cystic fibrosis awareness campaign