



A Shocking Journey to Feeling Better Than Ever

When it comes to heart disease, there's no discrimination – and family history is one of the toughest risk factors to overcome. That's why at age 45, a seemingly healthy Michael Blouin had a very shocking day that reminds us all of the importance of listening to our bodies.

It was May 30 – a regular day at work where Michael serves as a section manager for the local Caterpillar plant when he first started to notice something was off. After eating a spicy lunch, symptoms like heartburn and indigestion didn't seem too unusual. But, since they were paired with some mild shoulder pain and tingling in his hand – Michael might have thought twice about what he was feeling. The symptoms came and went throughout the day, but since they were mild, Michael went about his routine.

That night, with little appetite (another red flag), Michael skipped dinner and fell asleep in his recliner – until feelings of intense chest pressure woke him abruptly. After waking his wife and drinking some water, he started to feel better. Instead of seeking treatment, Michael did what so many patients do – ignored the potential seriousness of what was happening and went back to sleep. A few hours later, his body gave no mixed signals – Michael woke suddenly to the most intense pressure he'd ever felt and severe nausea.

His wife quickly got them on the road to WakeMed from their home in Clayton. Halfway there, he couldn't take the pain, so they pulled over and called an ambulance. Paramedics gave him nitroglycerine and monitored his vitals along the way. Just as they were nearing the WakeMed exit, he heard the crew say, "Pull over and charge the paddles." Michael had suffered his first cardiac arrest, which is a life-threatening event that occurs when your heart suddenly stops – often due to a heart attack or blockage.

The EMTs quickly shocked his heart back into rhythm using a defibrillator and upon arrival to WakeMed, Michael was taken to the cardiac catheterization lab where they found a 100% blockage of his left anterior descending artery – often referred to as the widow-maker.

He had a stent placed and a few hours later, while Michael was recovering, he unexpectedly suffered another cardiac arrest. Fortunately, WakeMed's Code Blue team was able to get his heart back into normal rhythm with the defibrillator. From there, Michael underwent another procedure and continuous monitoring to ensure his heart and arteries were healthy enough to go home.



THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Michael went home less than a week after the incident, but took two months off work to recover and focus on his health. He wore a LifeVest monitor and defibrillator for three months, which allowed Michael's care team to continuously monitor his heart for life-threatening problems.

Michael was also referred to cardiac rehab where he overcame his legitimate fear of the treadmill. Sadly, Michael's father (who also suffered from heart disease) experienced a fatal cardiac arrest while exercising on a treadmill at the young age of 56.

"I took my recovery very seriously – and I'm glad I did because I'm feeling better than I can ever remember feeling. Cardiac rehab helped me tackle my fears and build my strength," explains Michael.

He hasn't had red meat, pork, caffeine, alcohol or fried food since his cardiac events and consistently works out three to four times per week. "Sure, these changes might have been hard at first – but my health and being here with my family makes it easy not to 'cheat' – and that's my plan for the long-term."

Today, Michael is thrilled to have the energy to keep up with his kids – attending his son's basketball games and teaching his daughter to drive. He takes nothing for granted and feels fortunate to be here.

"My outlook on life is definitely more positive and I'm learning how to take one day at a time, which is good for my stress."

MICHAEL BLOUIN

