

A Story Worth Telling!

I am a heart attack survivor. On July 19, 2005 I didn't feel well when I got home from work so I took a nap. The chest pain woke me up. I found out later that I was very lucky because many women do what I did and never wake up. After trying to convince myself it was just indigestion I finally called my doctor's office and was told to call 911. "Are you sure?" I asked; because denial is more than just a river in Egypt.

If you knew me back then you know exactly what I did next; I lit a cigarette & changed my clothes, then I dialed 911. I finished the cigarette before the ambulance got there. It turned out to be the last cigarette I will ever smoke.

Once at the hospital I kept expecting the doctor to turn around and tell me it was heartburn and to go home and take some Pepto. Again, denial; all the nitro & aspirin they gave me in the ambulance was "just in case" right? Wrong, I was having a heart attack and within 15 minutes of entering the ER I was whisked away to the Cardiac Catheterization Lab.



The Cardiac Cath lab is where they shoot dye into your veins & look for blockages. Which they found. They placed 3 stents in my right coronary artery that night. Stents are rigid tubes and are meant to keep the arteries open so I would not need to go through a cardiac bypass surgery. I liked that plan.

After several days in the hospital I was able to go home and start my new life. No smoking, take all of my meds as prescribed and spend a lot of time in doctor's offices; Cardiologist, Endocrinologist, Lipidologist and the family doctor. As far as food goes I was allowed a low sodium, low cholesterol, low flavor diet. They said if it tasted good to spit it out!

After the first few weeks I was allowed to go to cardiac rehabilitation. Cardiac rehab involves building up the strength in your heart and the rest of your body. Or as I looked at it in the beginning – EXERCISE. Not a word I had used much before. Lucky for me, the folks that run Cardiac Rehab are great. They didn't laugh when I thought I would pass out after 10 minutes on the treadmill and 1.0 mile an hour. Over time I was able to use other machines and I also learned how to lift weights properly. No not the big dumbbells (that was me!). They have different weight machines that help various parts of the body.

More than three and a half years later I am still going to cardiac rehab. I could go to a gym or the YWCA but at cardiac rehab, if I have a problem, there is a nurse right there and a doctor is only a page away. It is amazing just how fast they can get you from rehab to the ER. You never, ever say the words "chest pain" in rehab unless you really mean it. They take those words very seriously.



Another great reason to stay at cardiac rehab is everyone there is in the same situation. Some people have been going there for years and we see new faces more often that you would think. I have struck up some great friendships with people at rehab. It makes exercising so much easier when you have someone to chat with and compare notes with. We encourage each other and celebrate the milestones.

I am so much healthier now than I was when I had the heart attack. Before my cholesterol was 389. Now it is 106. And thanks to bariatric surgery 7 months ago, I have lost about 100 pounds, I no longer need any diabetic meds and I take a lot less heart meds than I did in the beginning. I can now do well over 2.5 miles an hour on the treadmill and I can do most of the machines; just about everything except the Elliptical, though I am working up to it. If you don't know what an elliptical machine is, just think torture device.

What have I learned since the heart attack? Don't smoke, eat sensible, exercise, lose those extra pounds and take all your medication as prescribed. It seems those doctors knew what they were talking about. A heart attack was a huge wake up call for me, I was only 50 years old and it was the last thing I expected. Don't wait until you have a heart attack, trust me, it was no fun at all.

I was recently interviewed by WILX TV-10 about cardiac rehab. I guess the folks at rehab thought my story was worth telling.



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